ACTIVE PREACHING:

BRINGING THE TOOLS OF THE CLASSROOM TO THE PULPIT

A THESIS PROJECT

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To Vince, who believed in me before I believed in myself.

And to our St. Timothy's Community, who have encouraged and inspired me to preach (and teach) the Word in season and out.

Thank You

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My St. Timothy's community has been a loving and gracious testing ground for my theories about active preaching. This thesis-project would never have been possible

without their wholehearted support of me as a preacher and their willingness to be stretched and challenged by new preaching techniques. Their hunger for God and their desire to know Him more deeply motivates me to be a better preacher, a better pastor, and a better follower of Jesus. I am especially grateful to the members of the St. Timothy's community who shared their thoughts and feedback with me for my thesis-project—Linghui Eva Gan, Vincenzo Faruolo, Casey Smedberg, Alyssa Daniels, Gabrielle Davis, Alex Wright, Dylan Ballentine, Derefe Chevannes, Mariel Clores, Aldrine Estrella, Luke Burroughs, Adanma Akoma, Chifu Changomerana, Josh Lombardo, and Vince Gierer.

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GLOSSARY

Teaching – For the purposes of my thesis, I rely on Biblical scholar Claire S. Smith's definition of teaching: "to impart a message from an addresser to an addressee, where the purpose and/or result of the act is so cause the addressee to gain knowledge, understanding, a skill, attitude or belief or to transform thought, belief, or conduct."[1]

Preaching – My definition of preaching builds on Smith's definition of teaching, as I believe contemporary preaching combines the gaining knowledge and transforming thinking elements of teaching with an exhortational emphasis on calling people to action and inspiring an emotive or volitional response. I use the term "preaching" in its modern sense, not as the New Testament writers used the term.

Biblical Literacy – The ability to read, retain, and apply Biblical knowledge with the goal of building a Christian worldview. My use of "Biblical literacy" shares considerable overlap with the American Bible Society's term "Scripture engaged," by which they mean "consistent interaction with the Bible that shapes a person's choices and transforms their relationships with God, self, and others."[2]

[1] Claire S. Smith, *Pauline Communities as 'Scholastic Communities': A Study of the Vocabulary of 'Teaching' in 1 Corinthians, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 43.

[2] American Bible Society, *State of the Bible: USA 2021* (E-Book, 2021), 31.

Active Learning – Engaging students in the learning process through reading, writing, and discussion to promote learning, encourage higher-order thinking processes, and support self-reflection.

Active Preaching – Utilizing the tools and strategies of active learning to support increased congregational engagement in the sermon as well as improved informational retention from the sermon.

ABSTRACT

This thesis-project explores how Biblical literacy is affected when active learning strategies are incorporated into sermons in an approach I have labeled "active preaching." I conducted semi-structured interviews with my congregation to determine how active preaching strategies (active reviewing, active listening, active pausing, active writing, active sharing, active reflecting) have affected their Biblical literacy. The results of my interviews suggest that active reflecting, active writing, active pausing, and active listening are the most effective strategies for improving Biblical literacy, while active sharing is slightly less helpful. Overall, my findings strongly indicate that active preaching strategies positively affect Biblical literacy.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

Teaching and preaching are two distinct but related concepts often paired together in the Biblical text. In the New Testament, the Greek word διδάσκω is translated as "teach" and two Greek words are frequently translated as "preach": κηρύσσω (to herald or proclaim) and εὐαγγελίζω (to announce good news). Within its ancient usage, preaching was primarily a public, evangelistic act, while teaching generally referred to instruction in discipleship for believers. As Fieldon Thigpen explains, "New Testament writers viewed Christian preaching as an evangelistic proclamation and Christian teaching as an instruction in orthodoxy and orthopraxy."[1] As I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter Two, careful attention to the Biblical usage of the terms "preaching" and "teaching" suggests our contemporary understanding of preaching is more akin to the Biblical concept of teaching than the Biblical concept of preaching.

Though our understanding of teaching and preaching has shifted from its original New Testament usage, it is notable Jesus and the disciples are often described as not just teaching *or* preaching but rather teaching *and* preaching. Matthew 9:35 describes how Jesus "went through all the towns and villages, teaching (διδάσκων) in their synagogues, proclaiming (κηρύσσων) the good news of the kingdom" and Matthew 11:1 says that after Jesus had finished instructing the disciples, "he went on from there to teach (διδάσκειν)

[1] Fieldon Thigpen, "Misapplied Language: Toward A New Testament Lexicon of Preaching" (paper presentation, Evangelical Homiletics Society Conference, Chicago, IL, October 2022), 263. Jay E. Adams also makes a similar point in *Preaching with Purpose: The Urgent Task of Homiletics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982).

and preach (κηρύσσειν) in the towns of Galilee." Likewise, Luke 20:1 notes that "Jesus was teaching (διδάσκοντος) the people in the temple courts and proclaiming the good news (εὐαγγελιζομένου)," again pairing the two terms and positioning "teaching" in the primary position. Acts 15:35 describes Paul and Barnabas in Antioch "where they and many others taught (διδάσκοντες)and preached the word of the Lord (εὐαγγελιζόμενοι)." While the Gospels and Epistles contain many other refences to teaching and/or preaching, these representative examples demonstrate the frequency with which these terms are paired, suggesting that effective communication of the Gospel that transforms peoples' minds, hearts, and lives requires both teaching and preaching, both instruction and pronouncement, both discipleship and evangelism.

As the New Testament envisions teaching and preaching as mutually necessary for the growth of God's people, this thesis will explore ways that contemporary preachers can use tools from the classroom to make their sermons more effective vehicles for instruction and discipleship. As we restore elements of teaching to contemporary preaching in order to better reflect the ministry of Jesus, we can utilize the best practices from the field of education to create more effective sermons in the field of homiletics.

The Problem

Contrary to popular belief, mastery of a subject matter does not automatically translate into masterful teaching skills. Superstar athletes rarely become Hall of Fame coaches; brilliant academics do not always get exceptional teaching evaluations; and thoughtful theologians are not necessarily skillful communicators. Effective teaching is a skill set all its own, rooted in a mastery of material, a practical understanding of the

learning process, and a psychological understanding of human needs. Like any skill set, effective teaching can be learned and applied in a variety of contexts, but these teaching skills first need to be intentionally and purposefully taught.

While pastors often do a considerable amount of the Biblical education in their congregations, few seminaries or divinity schools require pedagogical coursework as part of their degree requirements. Even fewer incorporate instruction on teaching in their homiletics courses.[2] Studies of the textbooks seminaries use to train preachers illustrate that the emphasis in homiletics courses is more on improving communication skills than elucidating educational theories. [3] Seminarians study Haddon Robinson's *Biblical Preaching,* John Stott's *Between Two Worlds*, Bryan Chapell's *Christ-Centered Preaching,* Thomas Long's *The Witness of Preaching*, and Eugene Lowry's *The Homiletic Plot* to gain invaluable insight into exegesis, clarity, and effective delivery, but texts like Peter C. Brown, Henry L. Roediger III, Mark A. McDaniel's *Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning* or Pooja Agarwal and Patrice Bain's *Powerful Teaching: Unleash the Science of Learning* could be helpfully included to prepare pastors to be effective teachers as well as clear communicators.

I believe this lack of intentionality in developing pastors as both preachers and teachers of God's word leaves them underprepared to meet the needs of their congregation.

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[2] See Chapter Three for a fuller discussion of the coursework requirements at seminaries and divinity schools.

[3] See Chris Rappazini, "What Has Been Written: Quantitative Studies on Homiletical Textbooks Used in Seminary Classes," *Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* (Sept 2019): 27-45; Alex Kato, "The Theology Behind the Books We Choose," (paper presentation, Evangelical Homiletics Society Conference, South Hamilton, MA, October 2017); Troy Borst, "What are Seminaries Across Traditions Using to Teach the Next Generation of Preachers?" *Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* 15:2 (September 2015): 38-48.

A 2021 national study by the American Bible Society found that 54% of Americans believe that the Bible contains "everything a person needs to live a meaningful life," yet 41% of Americans believe that the Bible, the Koran, and the Book of Mormon are all "different expressions of the same spiritual truths." Only 32% of Americans consider the Bible to be "unique or distinct from other spiritual books."[4] Research like this suggests that people don't just need to be exhorted and encouraged to trust their lives to Jesus; they need to be taught what the Bible actually says about Jesus. In an increasingly nonreligious cultural context, people need effective Biblical teaching to help them build a strong foundation of faith.

As part of my research for my thesis project, I surveyed preachers to assess their view of the role of teaching in the pulpit. I designed a brief, ten-question survey to gather information from preachers about congregational engagement (paying attention during the sermon) and information retention (remembering sermon content afterward). The full survey and responses can be found in Appendix I.

Forty-one male and female pastors from diverse denominational backgrounds—Anglican, American Baptist, Southern Baptist, Congregational, Presbyterian, Non-Denominational, Evangelical Covenant, Episcopal, Methodist, and Church of Christ—responded to my survey. Their responses helpfully revealed the areas in which preachers feel they have ample effective teaching strategies and the areas in which they feel under-prepared or under-resourced.

[4] American Bible Society, *State of the Bible: USA 2021* (E-Book, 2021),6-8.

When asked if preaching is the primary tool for teaching Biblical knowledge in their congregations, 83% of the preachers agreed or strongly agreed (see Figure 1.1). Such a high percentage of agreement suggests that at least in these forty-one congregations, teaching is either happening alongside preaching, or it is not happening at all. These preachers carry the weight of both preaching and teaching in their sermons, whether or not they feel adequately prepared for it.

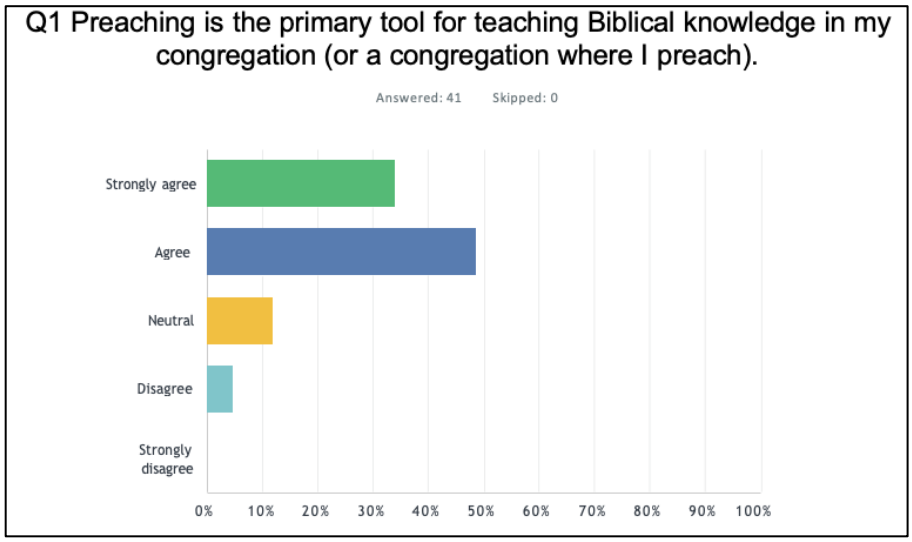

Figure 1.1: Preaching as Primary Tool for Teaching

According to the survey, 85% percent of respondents felt they had effective tools and strategies for engaging their congregation's attention while preaching, with 90% using personal stories, 88% using illustrations from the surrounding culture, 80% using humor, and 59% invoking felt needs (See Figure 1.2).[5]

[5] See Question #5 in Appendix I for the full range of responses for the strategies used to engage a congregation's attention.

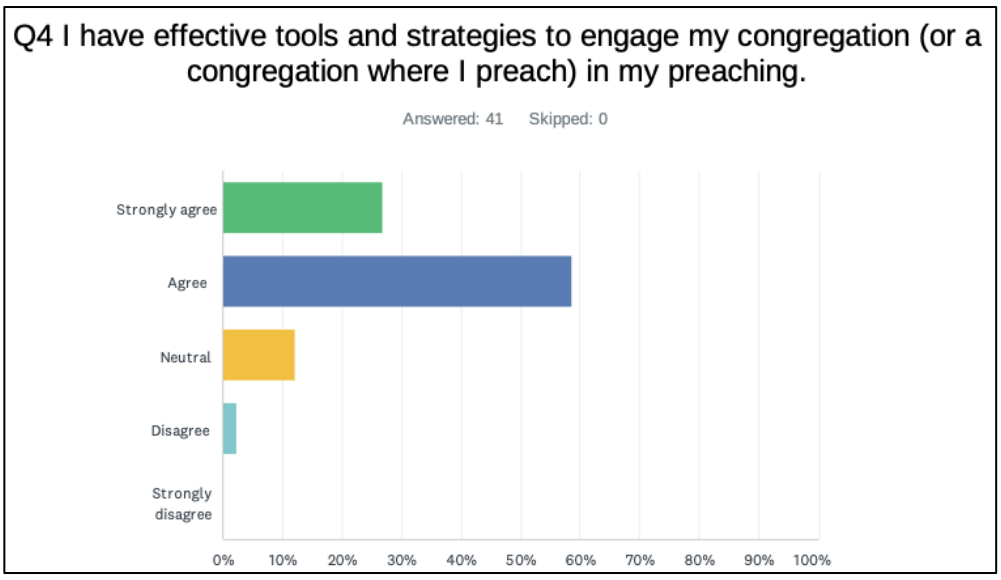

Figure 1.2: Engagement and Preaching

However, only 52% felt they had effective tools and strategies for helping their congregation retain Biblical knowledge after the sermon, with 88% offering practical applications in their sermons, 85% reading Scripture aloud in the service, 48% asking questions in their sermons, and 35% suggesting resources for additional study (See Figure 1.3). [6]

[6] See Question #8 in Appendix I for the full range of responses for the strategies used to help a congregation retain information.

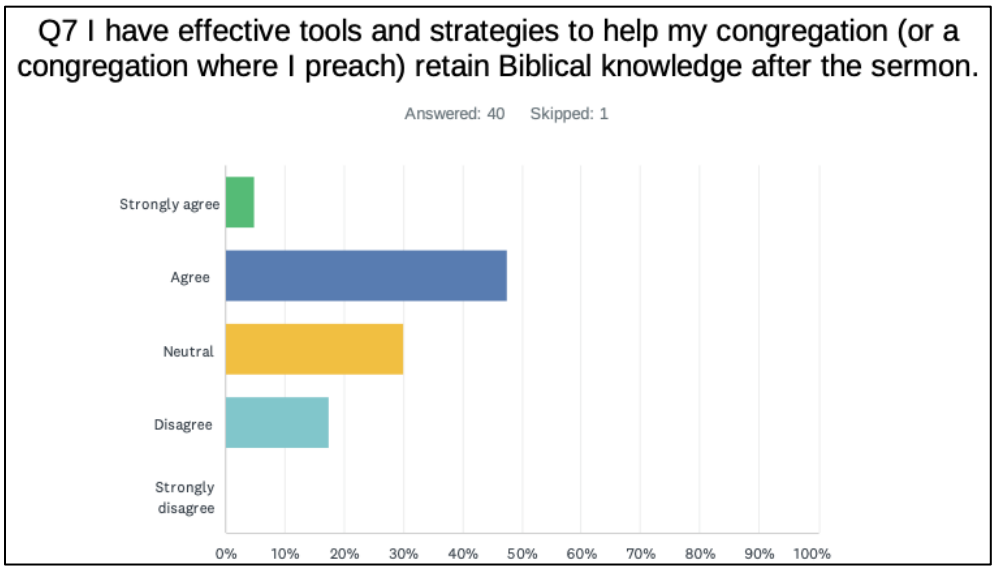

Figure 1.3: Information Retention and Preaching

Particularly notable were the various comments written in response to the final question, "Is there any additional information you would like to share about your experiences or strategies for congregational engagement and retention?" One respondent noted, "Probably half of our worship over the past two years have [sic] been recorded, without 'people in the pews.' It's been hard knowing if we [my wife and I are co-pastors] connected through the sermon. And even in person, it was mostly 'get in-get out'!" Another commented that s/he would like to do more to aid retention "but as a solo pastor I am limited in time and not able to do all of those things." A third responded "What we are doing right now isn't working to it's [sic] fullest potential but it seems like people are comfortable with it & it has enough benefits to have people not feel the need to innovate." These three responses capture the spectrum of problems preachers face when trying to be both the primary preacher and teacher in a congregation: difficulty in assessing their effectiveness, limited time to develop their skills sets, and skepticism as to whether their

efforts result in any notable improvements in their congregation's Biblical engagement and literacy.

While there is much more research to be done, my initial survey results opened my eyes to gaps in pastoral education and homiletic training. I had assumed more respondents would be concerned about engagement, but many felt they already had effective strategies for delivering engaging sermons and the majority were intentionally practicing these strategies. However, the preachers in my survey felt notably less prepared to help their congregations retain information from their sermons, had fewer strategies for doing so, and fewer preachers were intentionally practicing these strategies. Considering the limited pedagogical training most preachers receive, these results should not have been surprising. Preachers are trained to be thoughtful theologians and effective public speakers, with the expectation that mastery in these areas will organically translate into effective teaching. But it takes intentional training to become not just experts in a subject but also effective teachers of that subject, and this intentional training is largely missing from theological education. While pedagogical training perhaps happens in educational ministries courses, we are missing an important opportunity to connect the skills of preaching and teaching more explicitly in the homiletical classroom. Developing teaching and preaching as mutually necessary homiletic skills would benefit a significant percentage of preachers who are primarily responsible for both tasks, whether or not both are happening in the Sunday sermon.

Importance of the Study

While learning Biblical knowledge is not necessarily the primary or exclusive goal of a sermon, it is nevertheless an important and needful outcome, especially as more people are turning to the Bible for meaning and hope in a post-pandemic world. In 2021, the American Bible Society celebrated 205 years of researching American Bible usage with the publication of *State of the Bible: USA 2021*, referenced earlier in this chapter. Their research found that 181 million people opened their Bible at least once in 2021, reflecting a 7% increase from the previous year. Thus, between 2020 and 2021, 12 million Americans opened a Bible for the first time in a long time, or potentially even the first time ever.[7] Many of these 12 million people belong to what the American Bible Society defines as the "Moveable Middle," people who are neither deeply engaged with Scripture nor deeply disengaged. Alternately called "Bible Friendly" or "Bible Neutral," the Moveable Middle represents roughly 95 million Americans, including those who "sporadically interact with the Bible on the low end, to those who periodically open the Bible as a source of spiritual insight and wisdom." The American Bible Society notes that many of these individuals are at an important tipping point and "can easily shift to being more Bible-engaged, or they can give up and become less Bible-engaged because the Bible's influence has not taken root in their lives."[8]

The 37% of Americans (up from 26% in 2020) in the Moveable Middle comprise fertile soil for homileticians to sow the seeds of the gospel, as these Americans are marked by both an openness to the Bible and an inexperience with it. According to the American

[7] American Bible Society, *State of the Bible,* 9.

[8] American Bible Society, *State of the Bible,* 32, 20.

Bible Society, 78% of those in the Moveable Middle bump up against significant frustrations when trying to read their Bibles on their own. Of those surveyed, 22% of people in the Moveable Middle said they don't know where to start when reading the Bible on their own. Additionally, 20% feel frustrated they don't have enough time to read their Bibles, 17% find the language of the Bible difficult to relate to, 15% feel the layout of the Bible is difficult to navigate, 14% say they can't find what they are looking for when they open their Bibles, 12% find the stories too confusing, 10% don't understand the background of the Bible, and 9% are just not excited about reading their Bibles (See Figure 1.4).[9] All told, these numbers reflect 74 million people who need help to better understand and utilize their Bibles because they either don't know what is in the Bible or haven't been taught how to read it effectively.

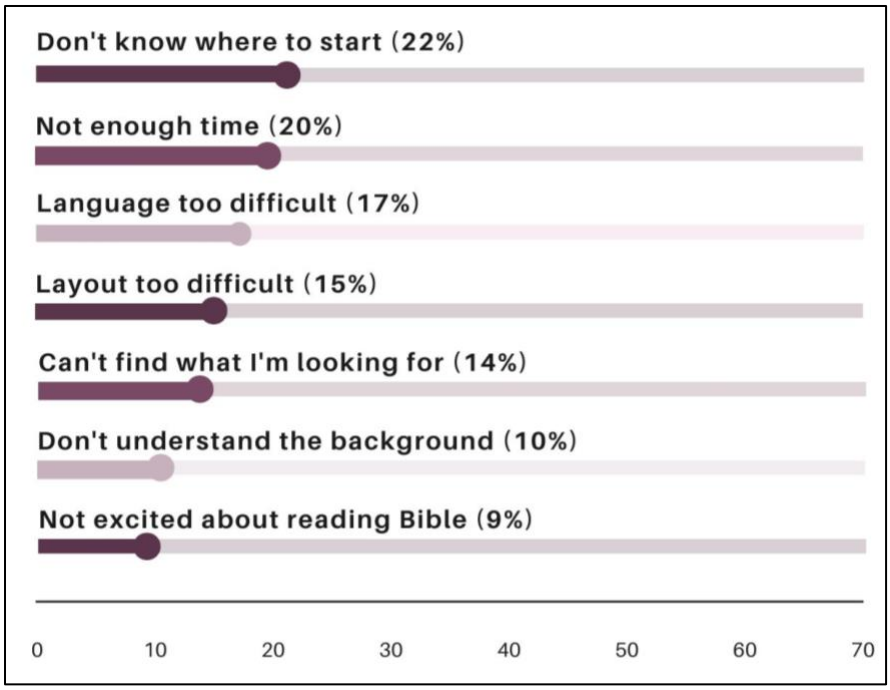

Figure 1.4: Most Frequent Frustrations When Using the Bible

[9] American Bible Society, *State of the Bible,* 24.

Thanks to this research, we know there are literally millions of people in need of effective Bible teachers. Understanding how to navigate their Bibles, having a better grasp on the historical background and literary style of the stories, or understanding the Bible as the unique, distinct, living word of God could encourage millions of people across America to become more deeply invested and engaged with their Bibles, thereby deepening their relationship with God. These people need strong Biblical preaching, but they also need effective Biblical teaching to give them the necessary skills to engage with the Bible on their own and improve their Biblical literacy.

Ministry Setting

My husband Vince and I share preaching, teaching, and leading responsibilities at our church, St. Timothy's, a small nondenominational congregation that meets on the campus of the University Connecticut (UConn) and ministers to the UConn community, including (but not limited to) undergraduate students, graduate students, staff, and faculty. When my husband and I planted the church in 2018, we committed to addressing the problem of Biblical illiteracy with the tools of active learning. Across many academic disciplines, active learning is increasingly the educational model students experience in the classroom. Practitioners of active learning maintain it not only increases a student's engagement in the learning process but also the retention of the material learned.[10] In

[10] For an overview of active learning as well as its benefits and challenges, see Charles C. Bonwell and James A. Eison, *Active Learning: Creating Excitement in the Classroom* (Washington D.C.: George Washington University, 1991); Louis Delauriers, et al, "Measure Actual Learning Versus Feeling of Learning in Response to Being Actively Engaged in the Classroom," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 116, no. 39 (2019); Richard M. Fedler and Rebecca Brent, *Teaching and Learning STEM: A Practical Guid*e (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2016).

their article "The Active Learning Continuum," Charles Bonwell and Tracey Sutherland note, "Students are simply more likely to internalize, understand, and remember material learned through active engagement in the learning process."[11] As a professor at the University of Connecticut, I was familiar with the effectiveness of active learning in the classroom and I was curious how these same techniques might apply in a preaching context. Thus, I identified six active learning strategies that could be translated from the classroom to the pulpit. I coined these strategies "active preaching" and we have been utilizing several of these strategies in our services every week since we first began:

1. **Active Reviewing:** Instead of the preacher reviewing the previous sermon(s) at the beginning of his/her message, the preacher invites the congregation to share key points they remember from the previous week(s). This practice encourages the congregation to more intentionally remember and engage with previous messages and also gives the preacher valuable information about what has been clear, memorable, and hopefully meaningful in previous sermons.
2. **Active Listening:** After reading the Scripture aloud, the preacher invites the congregation to spend a brief amount of time (1-2 minutes) writing down any words, phrases, or ideas that stood out to them and any questions the passage raised for them. Actively listening to the Scripture passage both engages the whole congregation in the Scripture reading and personalizes the passage for each individual.

[11] Charles C. Bonwell and Tracey E. Sutherland, "The Active Learning Continuum: Choosing Activities to Engage Students in the Classroom," *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* 67 (Fall 1996): 3.

3. **Active Pausing:** Periodically throughout the sermon (ideally at least every 10-15 minutes), the preacher pauses to interact with the congregation, asking them to respond to a question in writing, to share verbally with people around them, or to share verbally with the whole congregation. Alternately, the preacher can also ask what questions have emerged for the congregation, addressing certain questions in the moment or returning to these questions at the end of the sermon. The pause not only re-engages the congregation's attention, but it models healthy engagement with the Scriptures where we acknowledge questions and wrestle with them individually and corporately.
4. **Active Writing:** At various intervals throughout the sermon, the preacher can ask the congregation to personalize a Biblical concept by writing about it. This can be done in a variety of ways, including writing down questions, personal applications, personal prayer requests, etc. The writing topic can change depending on the context, but the act of writing will re-engage listener's attention, clarify personal relevancy, and surface questions.
5. **Active Sharing:** During the sermon, the preacher can ask the congregation to discuss a Biblical concept or sermon point with another person or group of people. The Think-Pair-Share model is popular in the classroom context because it re-engages the listener's attention and builds community, although it is also a frequently resisted activity as people may feel uncomfortable talking to strangers or anxious about sharing their thoughts and observations.
6. **Active Reflecting:** During the sermon or near the end, the preacher can ask the congregation to reflect on major applications or take-aways from the sermon

and/or lead the congregation in a guided meditation. Reflections or responses can be shared verbally or simply written down and will aid the congregation in memorizing and internalizing the passage while also allowing them to generate their own applications that are uniquely relevant to them.

Having survived several COVID-ravaged years, St. Timothy's currently has 15-20 people on an average Sunday and has become an ethnically diverse community of primarily single young adults, ranging in age between 18-35. My husband and I pastor the church and though we are both white, our community is largely Black and Asian, including several international students pursuing advanced degrees at UConn. Although racially and culturally diverse, our congregation is unified by a deep desire for learning, both academic and spiritual. Because of our university context, the community changes dramatically each year, with as many as half of our community members graduating in a single year. Thus, every fall provides both the challenge and the opportunity to start afresh with new community members coming from a variety of faith and cultural backgrounds.

While our community changes dramatically year to year, our service structure remains the same. Our sermons range from 25-35 minutes, and we begin every sermon with a brief Lectio Divina (which we call active listening) to help the congregation engage more deeply with the Biblical passage. We then intentionally incorporate additional active preaching strategies throughout the sermon, intentionally pausing two or three times over the course of a sermon to ask people to reflect in writing or to share their thoughts with the whole community. We have found most people are generally willing to participate, as they are in an environment where participation is normative and they are used to being asked

to participate in their university courses. Because participation is an important value in our service, after the sermon we also ask people to write down what they are asking God for and thanking God for and include these offerings of prayers and gratitude alongside their financial offerings to God. When we bless the offering, we invite people to share their requests and thanks with the larger community, so we can be praying and celebrating alongside them. During communion, people rise from their seats and come forward to the altar to receive communion and can also choose to receive a brief prayer of blessing from a pastor or prayer minister. Thus, intellectual, communal, and physical participation are encouraged throughout the service in hopes of modeling the active engagement with both God and community that is foundational for a flourishing life of faith.

Over the last six years, we have gotten positive feedback on our use of active preaching. People like the invitation to engage and dialogue with the text, the preacher, and the rest of the congregation. Several people have also said that hearing other people's responses to the passage has meaningfully shaped their own understanding of the Scripture. This active engagement with each other and God's word has built a strong sense of community and increased consistency in attendance. Each person's voice and perspective are noticeably absent when they miss a Sunday, so attendance has grown more consistent among those who actively participate.

While active preaching has had a positive effect on engagement and attendance, I am interested to study its effects on Biblical literacy. By "Biblical literacy" I mean the ability to read, retain, and apply Biblical knowledge with the goal of building a Christian worldview. My understanding of Biblical literacy shares considerable overlap with the American Bible Society's term "Scripture engaged," by which they mean "consistent

interaction with the Bible that shapes a person's choices and transforms their relationships with God, self, and others."[12] Although theoretically active preaching should support at least the information retention aspects of Biblical literacy, I still hear statements like "I don't know the Bible very well," or "I don't really read the Bible" from community members. Statements like these cause me to wonder how our active preaching strategies are challenging or enabling these self-reported low rates of Biblical literacy. I had assumed active preaching would be an effective counter to rising rates of Biblical illiteracy in young adults, and since that result has not yet been an obvious outcome of active preaching, I want to study the relationship between active preaching and Biblical literacy more intentionally.

Project Thesis

If we think of preaching as a toolbox, the field of education has useful practical tools that can be added to our homiletical toolboxes to help our congregations better learn, retain, and apply Biblical knowledge. None of these tools preclude the preaching goals of invitation and exhortation, nor do they prevent people from having transformational encounters with the Holy Spirit through the sermon. Instead, they enrich the preaching experience by layering in effective educational strategies, tested and proven through extensive research, that help us to better follow the example of Jesus to teach and preach to people hungry for Biblical truth.

To further explore the value of applying educational practices to a homiletic context, I will survey my St. Timothy's congregation to assess how active preaching has affected

[12] American Bible Society, *State of the Bible: USA 2021* (E-Book, 2021), 31.

their engagement with the Bible and their overall Biblical literacy. My main research question is: what are effective strategies for improving Biblical literacy? My thesis is that active preaching strategies will improve Biblical literacy.

In support of my thesis, Chapter 2 will provide a theological framework for my argument by further exploring the concepts of "preaching" and "teaching" in both a New Testament and a contemporary context. I will also demonstrate the ways Jesus practices active learning in his own teaching ministry, providing a strong Biblical foundation for a participatory approach to worship.

Chapter 3 will examine the texts commonly used in the homiletic classroom and consider how teaching skills might be incorporated into this course material. I will then review the relevant literature for active learning as well as dialogic preaching, a close cousin of active preaching.

Chapter 4 will detail the design of this thesis-project. I will describe how I designed, facilitated, and evaluated my semi-structured interviews with members of the St. Timothy's community as I assess the effectiveness of active preaching in improving their Biblical literacy.

Lastly, Chapter 5 will discuss the larger significance of the qualitative data I gathered during the interview process and consider the implications of my research for both my congregation and the larger field of homiletics.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

The theological framework for my project rests on three fundamental theological commitments: a Biblical (as opposed to cultural) understanding of the concepts of preaching and teaching; an awareness of the way Jesus modeled active preaching in his own teaching ministry; and an emphasis on worship as a participatory, congregational response to what God has done on our behalf. These three legs of my theological stool support this investigation of active learning as not just a secular educational model but also as an approach to preaching that is profoundly Christ-like.

Preaching & Teaching

As discussed in Chapter One, preaching and teaching are both significant New Testament terms, yet these terms were used differently by New Testament authors than they are today. In its Biblical context, "teaching" generally referred to religious instruction for believers and "preaching" generally referred to evangelistic public speaking. C. H. Dodd proposed these distinctions in *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments* (1964), noting, "This distinction is preserved alike in Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Apocalypse, and must be considered characteristic of early Christian usage in general,"[1] Though his argument has since been hotly debated, especially for the narrow way he defines and distinguishes between *kerygma* and *didache*, he nevertheless drew important scholarly attention to the Biblical terms for teaching and preaching, particularly *διδάσκω* (to teach) and *κηρυσσω* (to

[1] C.H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1964), 7.

preach), demonstrating that they were not as entirely interchangeable as previous generations of scholars had posited.[2]

While the debates for and against Dodd still rage, the Biblical text itself demonstrates notable differences in the uses of the two terms, which can help us better grasp how the Biblical authors understood these terms in their context. The Greek word *διδάσκω* (to teach) seems to have most commonly referred to ethical and ecclesiastical instruction in religious settings. From Matthew to Revelation, *διδάσκω* appears 97 times and 50 (51.5%) of these references indicate the teaching occurred in a private or religious setting, such as the synagogue, the temple, or in a small gathering of disciples. In contrast, only 15 (15.4%) of the NT usages of *διδάσκω* indicate a public audience. [3] More significantly, the material being taught seems to focus on theological and ethical topics, as Fieldon Thigpen notes the content of the teaching ranges "from the Law, parables, death and resurrection, honor and shame, submission and basic principles of Christian living."[4]

What is particularly notable about the function of teaching in the Gospels is that Jesus is the primary figure doing most of the teaching. Out of the 57 occurrences of *διδάσκω* in the Gospels, Matthew's Gospel references Jesus teaching 9 times,[5] Mark's Gospel

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[2] Among those who disagree with Dodd and believe *διδάσκω* and *κηρυσσω* are more complementary and interchangeable, some of the leading voices include: Robert H. Mounce, *The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1960), 41-42; Robert C. Worley, *Preaching and Teaching in the Earliest Church* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1967), 30-86; James I. H. McDonald, *Kerygma and Didache: The Articulation and Structure of the Earliest Christian Message* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 1-11.

[3] Fieldon Thigpen, "Misapplied Language: Toward A New Testament Lexicon of Preaching" (paper presentation, Evangelical Homiletics Society Conference, Chicago, IL, October 2022), 268. According to Thigpen, the remaining 32 (33%) of references to *διδάσκω* have an unspecified or uncertain audience.

[4] Thigpen, "Misapplied Language," 263.

[5] Matthew 4:23; 5:2; 7:29; 9:35; 11:1; 13:54; 21:23; 22:16; 26:55

describes Jesus teaching 15 times,[6] Luke's Gospel refers to Jesus teaching 14 times,[7] and John presents Jesus teaching 7 times.[8] Across the Gospels, the significant majority (79%) of the references to teaching are describing the actions of Jesus (See Table 2.1). More specifically, 70% of the appearances of *διδάσκω* in Matthew refer to Jesus, 88% of the appearances of *διδάσκω* in Mark refer to Jesus, 93% of the appearances of *διδάσκω* in Luke refer to Jesus, and 70% of the appearances of *διδάσκω* in John refer to Jesus.

Gospel	*διδάσκω* (to teach)	*κηρυσσω* (to preach)
Matthew	9 (of 14 overall)	4 (of 9 overall)
Mark	15 (of 17 overall)	3 (of 14 overall)
Luke	14 (of 16 overall)	2 (of 9 overall)
John	7 (of 10 overall)	0 (of 0 overall)

Table 2.1: Gospel References to Jesus Teaching & Preaching

If *διδάσκω* primarily referred to ethical and ecclesiastical instruction in religious settings, *κηρυσσω* (to preach) was generally used by New Testament authors to indicate more public, evangelistic proclamations, or what Jonathan Griffiths defines as the "public proclamation of an authoritative message by a person of recognized authority."[9] Appearing

[6] Mark 1:21; 1:22; 2:13; 4:1; 4:2; 6:2; 6:6; 6:34; 8:31; 9:31; 10:1; 11:17; 12:14; 12:35; 14:49

[7] Luke 4:15; 4:31; 5:3; 5:17; 6:6; 11:1; 13:10; 13:22; 13:26; 19:47; 20:1; 20:21; 21:37, 23:5

[8] John 6:59; 7:14; 7:28; 7:35; 8:2; 8:20; 18:20; Thigpen, "Misapplied Language," 265-268.

[9] Jonathan I. Griffiths, *Preaching in the New Testament: An Exegetical and Biblio-Theological Study* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 39; εὐαγγελίζω (to announce good news) is also often translated "to

61 times across the New Testament, 34 (55.7%) of the occurrences of *κηρυσσω* indicate the preaching happened in a public setting to an audience not primarily comprised of believers and only 5 (8.2%) of the usages specify a private or religious gathering . Thigpen notes that 40 (65.6 %) of the occurrences of *κηρυσσω* reference salvation through Jesus Christ, while 12 (19.7%) usages focus on other non-salvific topics (such as circumcision or healing), and 9 (14.7%) references have unidentified content, as in Mark 16:20 "Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere."[10] Thus Thigpen concludes, "Though the evidence is not totally unequivocal, it is generally true that the New Testament writers viewed Christian preaching as an evangelistic proclamation and Christian teaching as an instruction in orthodoxy and orthopraxy."[11]

While Jesus is the primary teaching figure in the Gospels, he is not the one doing the majority of the preaching. The Gospel writers reference *κηρυσσω* 32 times, with Matthew's Gospel referencing Jesus preaching 4 times,[12] Mark's Gospel describing Jesus preaching 3

preach," but is appears primarily in the Pauline Corpus and Luke/Acts. Of its roughly 55 uses in the New Testament, it appears 10 times in Luke, 15 times in Acts, and 21 times in the Pauline corpus. Moisés Silva, ed. *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis, Volume 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 308. Griffiths makes a similar observation about the New Testament usage of καταγγέλλω (to proclaim, to announce), which is not used in the Gospels and appears primarily in Acts. Griffiths, *Preaching in the New Testament*, 25-26. For the purpose of my argument, I focus on *κηρυσσω* because it is the phrase which appears most frequently in the Gospels and is connected most often to the ministry of Jesus.

[10]Thigpen, "Misapplied Language," 268, 257, 260.

[11] Thigpen, "Misapplied Language," 263.

[12] Matthew 4:17; 4:23; 9:35; 11:1. Interestingly, three of the four references in Matthew (4:23, 9:35, and 11:1) describe Jesus as both teaching and preaching.

times,[13] and Luke's Gospel referring to Jesus preaching 2 times.[14] John's Gospel never describes Jesus as preaching, nor includes any reference to *κηρυσσω* (See Table 2.1).[15] Across the Gospels, 28% of the references to preaching are describing the actions of Jesus, whereas 41% of the preaching is done by those ministering alongside him, including John the Baptist, the Apostles, and those who had been healed or delivered by Jesus's ministry.[16]

While teaching is referenced 57 times in the Gospels and preaching is referenced 32 times, they are only described together 4 times, with 3 occurrences in Matthew and 1 in Luke.[17] Though noting that teaching is always listed before preaching, Robert Worley maintains, "No particular conclusion can be drawn from this except to point out that even in describing the missionary activity of the disciples and apostles both words were used. They are apparently used interchangeably."[18] In attempting to push back against the particularities of Dodd's argument, Worley misses the forest for the trees. While I agree

[13] Mark 1:14, 1:38; 1:39

[14] Luke 4:44; 8:1; according to Thigpen's research Luke includes two references to the "Anointed One" preaching (Luke 4:18, 19), but these references are not included in the above count because Jesus is quoting Isaiah 61. Thigpen, "Misapplied Language," 264.

[15] M. Robert Mulholland Jr. points out that 40% (99 out of 240) of all the NT uses of the verb "believe" (πιστεύω) appear in John's Gospel. M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2016), 174-175. This suggests perhaps that John saw Jesus's ministry as a teacher helping faithful followers better understand their beliefs (i.e., John 20:31: "But these are written that you may [continue to] believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name") rather than a preacher convincing skeptics to believe.

[16] Thigpen's research notes that across the Gospels, John the Baptist is described as preaching 4 times, the Apostles are described as preaching 6 times, and the healed lepers and healed demoniacs are described as preaching 3 times. The remaining 31% of the references to preaching have an undefined or ambiguous subject. Thigpen, "Misapplied Language," 264-265.

[17] Worley, *Preaching and Teaching in the Earliest Church,* 34; Matthew 4:23, Matthew 9:35, Matthew 11:1, Luke 20:1, Acts 4:1-2. Acts 5:42, Acts 15:35, Acts 28:30-31

[18] Worley, *Preaching and Teaching in the Earliest Church.* 35.

that it's unlikely the Gospel writers intended to unilaterally privilege teaching over preaching, it's equally unlikely that they intended the terms to be interchangeable, as there are notable differences in the frequency with which the terms are used and the contexts in which they are used. The evidence of the text seems to suggest that the writers of the New Testament saw teaching and preaching as complimentary and mutually necessary ministries with different purposes and audiences. Interconnected but not interchangeable terms, in their ancient context teaching generally described discipling believers and preaching primarily described evangelizing to nonbelievers.

While scholars continue to debate the ancient usages of *διδάσκω* and *κηρυσσω*, they rarely touch on what seems to be most significant takeaway: Jesus is more often described as a teacher who also preaches than as a preacher who occasionally teaches. Across the four Gospels, Jesus does 79% of the teaching but only 28% of the preaching. Though the number of references alone does not necessarily indicate that teaching is privileged over preaching, the numbers do suggest that the writers of the New Testament describe Jesus's primary spoken ministry as discipleship rather than evangelism.. He spent more time unpacking and explaining the Christian life to interested interlocutors than proclaiming the Good News to unrepentant agnostics. John the Baptist preached repentance on the banks of the Jordan; Jesus taught the will of the Father over the dinner table.[19] Perhaps because simply encountering the living God in the flesh was enough to inspire faith and spark conversion, Jesus was first a teacher of God's word and then a preacher of God's kingdom.

[19] In his commentary on Matthew, Frederick Dale Bruner observes, "John's great task is *preaching*—Matthew emphasizes John's preaching more than John's baptizing." Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary.* Vol 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 86.

While the textual evidence suggests that Jesus's primary ministry was a teaching ministry, for centuries most Christian ministers focused on preaching as their primary ministry. Since roughly the fourth-century, when Christian worship took on a more structured, liturgical format and preaching was formally situated within that context, the terms "preaching" and "teaching" have experienced a significant semantic shift from their New Testament usage.[20] Elevated as the more transformational task, preaching has become the discipleship training that happens in a religious setting, while teaching has been relegated to theological instruction that happens in Sunday school or religious education classes.

In the eyes of many contemporary pastors, teaching is communicating Biblical information; preaching is applying Biblical information to people's lives. Thus, in *Preaching that Moves People,* Yancey Arrington argues, "Teaching is giving information that explains. Preaching is calling people to respond to information that explains. […] It is this call for a response that differentiates the professor from the preacher, the classroom from the sanctuary."[21] J.I. Packer expresses a similar point more forcefully, writing, "To pass on biblical content, unapplied, is only to teach, not to preach. A lecture, as such, is not a sermon. Preaching is teaching plus—plus what? Plus application of truth to life. […] [W]hereas one lectures to clear heads and ripens minds, one preaches to change lives and save souls."[22] In the ancient world, preaching and teaching tended to be defined by the

[20] David Dunn-Wilson, *A Mirror for the Church: Preaching in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2005): 62-65.

[21] Yancey Arrington, *Preaching that Moves People: How to Get Down the Mountain of Your Messages with Maximum Impact* (League City, Texas: Clear Creek Resources, 2018), 33, 34.
[22] J.I. Packer, *Truth & Power: The Place of Scripture in the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1996), 165, 175.

audience (believers or nonbelievers, religious or public setting), but in modern terms they tend to be defined by the application (or lack thereof). Additionally, Siang-Yang Tan attributes the difference between preaching and teaching to the work of the Holy Spirit, noting, "A good teacher may not necessarily be a good preacher, because preaching requires the special unction from the Holy Spirit to enable a pastor to preach powerfully, passionately, and effectively so that lives are deeply touched and transformed. Teaching should also be anointed by the Spirit, but it may not be as intense or forceful in its presentation."[23]

Such arguments reflect an unnecessarily narrow understanding of teaching and are not built upon a Biblical foundation. As evidenced above, the ministry of Jesus does not suggest that preaching is privileged over teaching, nor that teaching primarily affects the mind and not the heart, nor that the Holy Spirit functions more powerfully in preaching than in teaching. In fact, Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount, perhaps Jesus's most famous sermon, begins by noting: "He began to teach (ἐδίδασκεν) them."[24] Our modern understanding of teaching and preaching has migrated notably from the Biblical usage of the terms, opening the possibility of significant misunderstanding about the role of teaching and preaching in both the ministry of Jesus and the ministry of the contemporary church. In his own thorough analysis of *διδάσκω* and *κηρυσσω*, Thigpen concludes by noting, "A misapplication of the term 'preaching' can lead to definitions and theologies of

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[23] Siang-Yang Tan, *Shepherding God's People: A Guide to Faithful and Fruitful Pastoral Ministry* (Baker Academic, 2019. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=5785250), 52.

[24] For a fuller discussion of the use of ἐδίδασκεν at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, see W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (New York, NY: Cambridge UP, 1966), 7-8.

preaching which are skewed from that which is presented in the biblical texts. Tremendously important topics such as *who can preach*, *how one should preach*, and *why ought one preach* are doomed to confusion if the presumed definition of preaching is inconsistent with that of the New Testament."[25] Thigpen rightly raises important questions about the implications of the semantic shifts in our understanding of teaching and preaching, questions that are beyond the scope of this thesis but questions that nonetheless need to be thoughtfully addressed. At the very least, when we claim to build our theology of preaching on a Biblical foundation but our terminology reflects modern perspectives more than Biblical practices, we must acknowledge the gap and develop a philosophy of homiletics that takes into account the etymology of our terminology.

Thus, while I generally agree with Dodd, Adams, Griffiths, Thigpen, and others that the modern understanding of preaching is more akin to the Biblical understanding of teaching than of preaching, the most important takeaway from this word study is that the contemporary church has diminished the role of teaching in favor of the role of preaching without a Biblical foundation for doing so.[26] As Jesus is more frequently described as teaching rather than preaching, we need a robust understanding of teaching that better reflects its frequent appearance in the ministry of Jesus.. In her exhaustive study of the vocabulary of teaching in Pauline literature, Claire S. Smith offers this lengthy yet holistic definition of what it means to teach: "to impart a message from an addresser to an

[25] Thigpen, "Misapplied Language," 270.

[26] Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments,* 7; Adams, *Preaching with Purpose*; 39; Griffiths, *Preaching in the New Testament,* 17-40; Thigpen, "Misapplied Language"; Andrew B. McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014): 72-73; Dunn-Wilson, *A Mirror for the Church*, 62-65.

addressee, where the purpose and/or result of the act is so cause the addressee to gain knowledge, understanding, a skill, attitude or belief or to transform thought, belief, or conduct."[27] This is the kind of inclusive understanding of teaching that best reflects its Biblical usage as a multi-faceted tool for sharing the kingdom of God with the people of God. Though a bit wordy and cumbersome, this is the definition of teaching upon which I will build my argument in the coming chapters as it embodies the dynamic possibilities in both the message and the medium of the teaching content.

Keeping in mind this understanding of teaching as imparting a message in order to transfer knowledge or transform beliefs, I believe preaching can best be understood as teaching plus exhortation. Preaching contains the gaining knowledge and transforming thinking elements of teaching and adds its own element of calling people to action and inspiring an emotional and/or volitional response.. Haddon Robinson famously defines preaching (specifically, expository preaching) as "the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of as passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers."[28] Robinson's definition suggests a well-prepared teaching of the passage partners with power of the Holy Spirit to apply the verses uniquely and specifically to both preacher and congregation. Teaching is

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[27] Claire S. Smith, *Pauline Communities as 'Scholastic Communities': A Study of the Vocabulary of 'Teaching' in 1 Corinthians, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 43.

[28]Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 20. While expository preaching is not the only model of preaching, Robinson's definition is foundational to many understandings of preaching and is also relevant to many different models of preaching.

thus a necessary ingredient of preaching, and more effective preaching happens hand-in-hand with more effective teaching.[29]

Because I believe effective teaching is a necessary element of effective preaching and because the idea of the Sunday sermon as synonymous with preaching is so pervasive in our contemporary moment, I have chosen to use the term "active preaching" to describe my approach to Biblical instruction and proclamation, which focuses on translating active learning principles from the classroom and applying them in the pulpit. By using the term active preaching and highlighting how the concept of preaching has shifted significantly from its Biblical context, my goal is to bring modern preaching back to its New Testament teaching roots without getting bogged down by abiblical biases against teaching.

Jesus and Active Preaching

Throughout the Gospel accounts, Jesus's ministry embodies many different teaching styles. Jeffrey D. Arthurs notes, "God the Son certainly communicated with variety. Dialogue, story, visuals, and 'lecture' were common in his teaching, which was participatory and image laden."[30] As Arthurs highlights, Jesus utilizes diverse methods to help people better understand and engage with his teachings. Often, he teaches through stories, as with

[29] While homiletics scholars such as Timothy Keller and Thomas Long have explored the role of the Holy Spirit in creating a transformative encounter during the preaching act, the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching and experiences of transformational encounters during preaching are topics that deserve much more detailed explorations than I can offer in this thesis. My research focuses more on the cognitive effects of preaching, although I believe the work of the Holy Spirit is a profoundly important part of effective preaching.

[30] Jeffrey D. Arthurs, *Preaching with Variety: How to Re-create the Dynamics of Biblical Genres* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2007), 23.

his parables, which comprise roughly one third of his overall teachings.[31] Other times, he teaches the power of God not just through words but also through miraculous healings. Matthew 4:23 and 9:35 both note that Jesus was "teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness," suggesting that his healing ministry was deeply intertwined with his teaching ministry. Occasionally, Jesus even gives his disciples direct and straightforward instruction, as he does in Luke 9 when he sends out the twelve to minister with clear instructions: "Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt. **4** Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town.**5** If people do not welcome you, leave their town and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them." Generally, though, Jesus's teaching style is less straightforwardly direct and he brings people into contact with the truth of God and the good news of the Gospel by asking provocative questions that open up conversation. Martin B. Copenhaver estimates that Jesus is asked 183 questions over the course of the Gospels and asks 307 in return, while Ralph and Gregg Lewis highlight the 19 questions Jesus asks over the course of the Sermon on the Mount alone.[32] As William P. Merrill expresses it, "He came not to answer questions, but to ask them; not to settle men's souls, but to provoke them; not to save men from problems, but to save them from their indolence; not to make life easier, but to make it more educative."[33] Thus, after asking a

[31] J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Parables of Jesus: Lessons in Life from the Master Teacher* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1998), 10.

[32] Martin Copenhaver, *Jesus is the Question: The 307 Questions Jesus Asked and the 3 He Answered* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014), xviii; Ralph L. Lewis and Gregg Lewis, *Learning to Preach Like Jesus* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1989), 152. Ralph L. Lewis and Gregg Lewis alternately argue that of the 3,297 questions asked in the Bible, Jesus asks 153. Neither book clearly indicates how the authors came to these different numbers.

[33] Quoted in Herman Harrell Horne, *Jesus the Master Teacher* (New York, NY: Association Press, 1942), 51.

question, or responding to a question with a question, Jesus often resists giving definitive or decisive answers. Repeatedly in the Scripture, he evades a direct response and instead invites people to reflect upon their previous knowledge and experience of God. For example, in Matthew 11 John the Baptist is imprisoned and sends disciples to ask Jesus "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?", thus questioning Jesus as to why he has not brought divine judgment in the way John was expecting. Though he could have ignored the implied critique and simply replied "I am He," Jesus instead responds by telling John's disciples, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see," before paraphrasing prophesies from Isaiah, saying, "The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor."[34] Even the imprisoned John the Baptist, of whom Jesus later says, "Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist," does not get a direct answer from Jesus.[35] Instead, Jesus points him to God's word and invites him reflect on what he is experiencing (hearing/seeing) through Jesus's ministry. Time and time again, Jesus answers direct questions by pointing people to the Scriptures and urging people to seek God, trust in God's word, and believe in God's goodness.

In light of his interrogatory style, Jesus's teaching ministry models many of the values and practices of active preaching. Jesus did not stand in a pulpit and lecture for thirty to forty-five minutes like many contemporary preachers; instead, his teaching

[34] Jesus's response reflects references to Isaiah 35 and Isaiah 61

[35] Mathew 11:11

ministry was a mix of public speaking and personal conversations. Of the 45 references to Jesus teaching (*διδάσκω*) in the Gospels, only 8 (18%) of these references refer to him teaching the crowds.[36] The majority of his teaching ministry happened in smaller, more conversational settings where listeners could interact and engage with him. Jeffrey Arthurs and Andrew Gurevich highlight specifically his conversations with Nicodemus (John 3) and the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) as illustrative of Jesus's teaching ministry, noting that "the listeners are not passive but rather active participants in the message. Jesus never compromised the truth, but by using dialogue, he applied it with crystalline relevance to his listeners' beliefs, attitudes, and actions."[37] Though Nicodemus the Pharisee and the Samaritan woman at the well represent two very different audiences, in both instances Jesus speaks *with* and not *at* them, responding to their questions and concerns with specificity and personal relevancy appropriate to their very different social and cultural positionalities. It is notable that when the Samaritan woman returns to the town, she tells everyone, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did."[38] She is not inviting people to experience the brilliance of Jesus's theological insight, but rather the personal relevancy of His good news, demonstrating the power of His dialogic model of ministry to stir transformational responses in his conversation partners.

Additionally, Ralph and Gregg Lewis note that the Gospels depict Jesus having roughly 125 conversations with the people around him and, by their calculations, more than half (54%) of those conversations are initiated by the people. As they observe,

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[36] Thigpen, "Misapplied Language," 265-267.
[37] Jeffrey Arthurs and Andrew Gurevich, "Proclamation through Conversation: Dialogue as a Form for Preaching," *Journal of the American Academy of Ministry* 5 (1997): 36.

[38] John 4:29

"Instead of standing up and proclaiming the message He wanted the people to hear, He responded to His audience's questions, objections, and doubts. He allowed and welcomed their involvement."[39] Not only did Jesus welcome their involvement, but his teaching ministry was largely directed and guided by the concerns and questions of both his followers and his critics. For example, throughout John's Gospel the evangelist records seven key messianic teachings where Jesus explained "I am": I am the bread of life (John 6:35); I am the light of the world (John 8:12); I am the door (John 10:9); I am the good shepherd (John 10:11); I am the resurrection and the life (John 11:25); I am the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6); I am the true vine (John 15:1). Each of these important teachings come in response to a conversation or a question. In John 6, he is responding to the people's request for more bread; in John 8 and 10 he is responding to the Pharisee's doubt and criticism; in John 11 he is responding to Martha's belief that Lazarus will rise again in the resurrection; and in John 14 and 15 he is responding to the questions and concerns of the disciples. All seven of these foundational messianic teachings reflect active preaching; they come in response to conversations with the Pharisees, the crowds, and his followers and are framed in relevant, personal, memorable ways that the listeners will be able to understand and apply.

While modern preachers skillfully emulate many of Jesus's teaching methodologies, most are less comfortable—or at least less prepared—to invoke the Socratic, dialogic style he exemplifies in many teaching moments. Modern preaching in my white, western, nondenominational tradition generally defaults towards monological communication, with preachers and congregations expecting a sermon to be a well-prepared and well-delivered

[39] Lewis and Lewis, *Learning to Preach Like Jesus,* 22.

pastoral monologue, while the congregation listens and responds non-verbally, if at all. Jonathan T. Pennington argues in favor of this monological model, maintaining that preaching is primarily monological and good teaching is dialogical. As he argues, "The goal and content of preaching should be kept clearly distinct from what can be done through teaching," and the church needs "a separate venue" where "teachers can address a raft of topics and do so focusing on nuanced explication in a dialogical environment."[40] While I agree that good teaching is dialogical, it is inaccurate and unbiblical to insist that preaching must be monological. Monological preaching is one mode of preaching, and an effective tool that embodies the proclaiming aspect of *κηρυσσω* but it does not effectively capture the διδάσκω aspect of Jesus's ministry, which was his most frequent mode of communication in religious settings. In fact, Arthurs and Gurevich argue quite the opposite of Pennington, writing, "All preaching should be dialogic."[41] As they explain, dialogic preaching is "preaching (and preparing to preach) in a way that encourages the communication process rather than discourages it," as communicating (or dialoguing) with our congregations "can help us analyze and respond to listeners' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors so that God's Word can be understood, felt, and obeyed."[42] The goal of dialogic teaching and preaching is not just nuanced explication, as Pennington suggests, but also meeting felt needs. Without hearing directly from the congregation, preachers are left to assume the questions, struggles, and needs the congregation is bringing to the sermon, and sometimes these assumptions reflect the perspective of the preacher more than the perspective of the

[40] Jonathan T. Pennington, *Small Preaching: 25 Little Things You Can Do Now to Become a Better Preacher* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021), 27.

[41] Arthurs and Gurevich, "Proclamation through Conversation," 35.

[42] Arthurs and Gurevich, "Proclamation through Conversation," 35.

congregation. As George Swank explains, "Monologue deals primarily if not exclusively with the concerns and conclusions of the speaker, who attempts to persuade the audience to his or her way of thinking. […] Dialogue, on the other hand, begins with the concerns of the gathered people. Their contributions to the speaking will be evident in subtle, if not overt ways."[43] A commitment to dialogic communication can find many forms of expression in preaching, but to limit its benefits to the classroom is a loss to the congregation.

In closing this section, it is important to situate my model of active preaching within the larger field of dialogic preaching. As a subset of dialogic preaching, active preaching shares the goals of engaging the congregation in the sermon as active participants instead of passive listeners through congregational interaction, personal reflection, and feedback. While dialogic preaching primarily focuses broadly on the communication process, active preaching focuses more specifically on the learning process, thus falling under the umbrella of dialogic preaching but expressing its educational priorities in unique ways. Active preaching is a specific expression of dialogic preaching that focuses on helping people read, retain, and apply Biblical knowledge with the goal of building a Christian worldview. While I hope to convince preachers that active preaching practices would be valuable additions to their sermons, there are already many preachers committed to dialogic preaching and publishing valuable resources. I will review many of these resources on dialogic literature in my literary review (Chapter 3).

[43] George W. Swank, *Dialogic Style in Preaching* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1981), 21.

Participatory Worship

Having established a Biblical understanding of teaching and preaching and highlighted Jesus's use of active preaching in his own ministry, developing a theology of worship that emphasizes the importance of participation is the final leg of my theological stool. Particularly in our post-COVID landscape, where people are watching worship services on their televisions as passively as they watch their favorite Netflix miniseries, recapturing an emphasis on participatory, rather than passive, worship seems vital for the well-being of both people and churches.

Although the early church was an interactive space where many voices and hands contributed,[44] contemporary congregations have shifted towards what Robert Webber describes as "pastor-centered worship" or Constance Cherry calls "program worship," in which the pastor does all the reading, speaking, preaching, and praying while the congregation watches on expectantly, waiting to be either entertained or educated, ideally both.[45] When skillful staff and volunteers are limited or global pandemics force churches online, pastor-centered worship is indeed the pragmatic choice. However, it is far from the ideal choice, as it often leaves the congregation with little to contribute. Cherry notes this passive style of worship is problematic for (at least) three reasons: God becomes "the topic of worship rather than the source of worship," the congregation is "not involved except on the observational level," and passive worship lends itself to critical assessment of the

[44] Andrew McGowan notes of early church services, "the earliest Christian meetings included opportunities for various spoken contributions, not just one authoritative discourse," *Ancient Christian Worship,* 76.

[45] Robert E. Webber, *Worship is a Verb* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 129; Constance Cherry, "Passive to Participative" (paper presentation, Symposium on Worship, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI, January 2006), https://iws.edu/2006/02/constance-cherry-passive-to-participative/

"performers" as "the performance is done for us and begs our satisfaction."[46] Rather than a community of worshippers seeking the presence of God together, pastor-centered or program worship can slip into a community of observers seeking the performance of the pastor(s) together.

Strongly opposed to this model of worship, Webber argues, "passive worship cannot be justified on the grounds of Scripture, theology, or history. For this reason, it is a matter of utmost urgency that the church break through the obstacle of a passive worship."[47] Webber wrote these words almost forty years ago, well before the rise of online church services, yet his call to action has only become more urgent in the intervening decades. How do you prevent people from becoming passive observers of worship when they are in their homes watching a worship service on a screen? How do you push back against an increasingly consumeristic culture and convince people that worship is designed for God's glory and not their entertainment? How do you help people see that their church attendance is crucial not to fill seats but to facilitate bringing an offering of worship to God?

According to Webber, there is a clear, Biblical answer: teach people to participate. As he argues, participatory worship is the best way forward for both pastors and congregations, where the pastor and the congregation partner together to hear from God and respond to God. He calls for a "radical rediscovery of the principle of the priesthood of all believers—a principle that encourages everyone to become involved in a participating manner in offering the worship of praise and thanksgiving to the Father."[48] For Webber,

[46] Cherry, "Passive to Participative."
[47] Webber, *Worship is a Verb,* 136.

[48] Webber, *Worship is a Verb,* 133, 152.

everyone contributes something to a service—their voice, their prayers, their faith, their encouragement, their needs—and all these contributions are necessary to bring a full offering of worship before God. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:26: "What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation." As Paul describes a corporate gathering, each person has the opportunity to bring their unique gifts to enliven the service, engage the community, and encounter God. And each individual contribution creates a more powerful, transformative worship experience for the whole community.

In her own work on participatory worship, Constance Cherry has identified six practical principles to help church leaders more effectively engage their congregations in worship:

1. "Participative worship is experiential worship." Contemporary churchgoers want meaningful experiences in church services and participation in worship leads to powerful experiences in worship.
2. "Participation involves partnering with others." Interacting with other worshipers creates a deeper and stronger sense of community.
3. "People will naturally tend to be passive." Opportunities to participate need to be clearly communicated and repeatedly encouraged.
4. "Congregations have been largely oriented toward an audience mentality." Churchgoers have been trained to sit and watch so they must be intentionally re-trained to worship with not just their minds but also their physical bodies.

5. "Recognize that worship is work." People need to be taught that worship should cost them something, be it their time, their energy, their prayers, their testimonies, or their tears.
6. "Encountering God in worship results in powerful responses." People need to be taught how to respond to God's presence in worship by having practical, purposeful, meaningful applications.[49]

According to Cherry, keeping these principles in mind when planning church services can help shift people's perspective from the passive framework of "going to church" to the more participatory understanding of "coming to offer worship" which "suggests engagement with the God who awaits your presence."[50]

While participatory worship can take a variety of forms and formats, focusing on musical worship, responsorial readings, communion, and interactive liturgies, I am most interested in how a participatory model of worship affects preaching. How do preachers position themselves to cultivate more participatory worship in their congregations? Thomas Long offers several metaphors for preaching—the herald who proclaims the truth of the Scriptures, the pastor who cares for the well-being of the people, the storyteller who vividly recreates the Biblical text, and the witness who testifies to the power of God—and each addresses an aspect of Jesus's ministry as a truthteller, a healer, a teller of parables, and the Messiah. Yet none of these metaphors reflect a participatory model of worship or offer a framework for preachers to imagine their role in a participatory setting.[51] To

[49] Cherry, "Passive to Participative."

[50] Cherry, "Passive to Participative."

[51] Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 3rd Ed (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 20-56.

encourage and support participatory worship, I believe we need to add an additional metaphor to Long's list—the preacher as facilitator of people's encounters with God. If we use Cherry's language of attending church as "coming to offer worship," than the preacher supports people in offering their worship by providing a framework for their worship through the order of the service and providing a focus for their worship by revealing the character of God in the Scriptures. The preacher is not required to have all the right answers, or the most engaging illustrations, or even the most compelling apologetics because the primary encounter is not between the preacher and the people, but between the people and God. The preacher functions as a facilitator providing a framework and a focus for this encounter, but the encounter itself depends on God and the people.

This metaphor of preacher as a facilitator of divine encounters influences how we understand the form and function of the sermon. As discussed in the previous section, monological preaching can lend itself to passive worship, but dialogic preaching opens up new possibilities for participatory worship. Defining preaching from a participatory perspective, Michael J. Quicke says, "Christian preaching, at its best, is a biblical speaking/listening/seeing/doing event that God empowers to form Christ-shaped people and communities."[52] Quicke's definition emphasizes that the listening, seeing, doing parts of preaching are just as central as the speaking part, meaning both the speaker and the listener contribute to the "event" of preaching and have a shared experience that transforms both the listeners and the speakers. According to Quicke, preaching is a mutual experience where neither the preacher nor the congregation can remain passive. Preaching

[52] Michael J. Quicke, *Preaching as Worship: An Integrative Approach to Formation in Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 87.

doesn't actually happen if the congregation doesn't participate; then the pastor is only speaking, not preaching. Doug Pagitt expresses a similar emphasis on mutual participation as he advocates for preaching to be understood as "progressional dialogue" rather than the "speaching" of monological preaching. As Pagitt explains, "speaching" is "the style of preaching that is hardly distinguishable from a one-way speech" and "is inconsistent with the outcomes we want to see arise from our preaching." Believing that transformational preaching "is an act of poetry—of putting words around peoples' experiences to allow them to find deeper connection in their lives," Pagitt invites members of his congregation into a weekly meeting to share their perspective on a Biblical text or their stories with God. He uses these conversations to shape his Sunday messages so that more honest perspectives and authentic experiences are represented in his "progressional dialogues."[53] Pagitt's model of preaching fully embodies and embraces participatory worship and though his isn't the only or necessarily the best model, his work helpfully represents the full spectrum of participatory preaching.

While there are many theological and theoretical arguments in favor of participatory worship, active preaching seeks to take these understandings of preaching as a shared worship experience between the preacher and the congregation and embody them in practical strategies that any preacher can use in his/her own context to make the worship experience more interactive and ultimately more participatory. Thus, if one believes that teaching Biblical truth is as important as applying it, that Biblical truth can best be taught by facilitating divine encounters between God and His people, and that the

[53] Doug Pagitt, *Preaching Re-Imagined: The Role of the Sermon in Communities of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 210, 212.

most powerful encounters happen when people are actively participating in the worship experience, active preaching is a valuable, practical tool to help walk out these theological commitments in our sermons.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

If we think of a sermon as a prayerfully built bridge connecting the congregation to God's word, the field of education offers valuable tools that can help build a stronger and longer-lasting bridge. None of these tools preclude the preaching goals of invitation and exhortation, nor do they prevent people from having transformational encounters with the Holy Spirit through the sermon. Instead, they enrich the preaching experience by layering in effective educational strategies, tested and proven through extensive research, that help us to better follow the example of Jesus to teach and preach to people hungry for Biblical truth. Again, learning is not necessarily the primary or exclusive goal of a sermon, but it is nevertheless an important and needful outcome.

To better understand how the field of education can contribute to the field of homiletics through active preaching, this chapter will first examine the foundational textbooks currently used to train preachers to illustrate the absence of active preaching principles from current preaching practices. Then I will look to educational texts to demonstrate how pedagogical theories can complement and expand the current curriculum in homiletics. Lastly, I will situate active preaching in the larger context of dialogic preaching, noting how active preaching can avoid some of the potential pitfalls of dialogic preaching.

Preaching Texts: Training The Next Generation of Preachers

When an aspiring (or already successful) preacher attends seminary, what does he or she learn about preaching? Especially as evangelical seminaries tend to require more preaching courses than their mainline counterparts, the theological frameworks and practical strategies that are shared, emphasized, or even unconsciously transmitted in the homiletics classroom are shaping the next generation of evangelical preachers.[1] Analyzing preaching syllabi from 123 seminaries and divinity schools in the Association of Theological Schools, Alex Kato found that the top five learning objectives in preaching courses at both mainline and evangelical schools indicated that course was designed to teach students: to preach/deliver sermons, prepare sermons, to interpret the Bible, to articulate a theology of preaching, and to reflect on a text theologically. Preaching courses at mainline schools additionally emphasized that students would leave the class being able to engage various approaches, exegete the culture, use their own preaching voices, critique their own preaching, and appreciate diversity. Alternately, preaching courses at evangelical schools focused on supporting students to show spiritual growth, articulate a Biblical preaching theology, preach prayerfully, write a sermon outline, and interpret various Biblical genres.[2] Overall, the goals of preaching classes across the board were practical and

[1] I am deeply grateful to Alex Kato for sharing his extensive research on preaching syllabi from seminaries in the Association of Theological Schools. While he presented some of his findings at the 2017 Evangelical Homiletics "The Theology Behind the Books We Choose," much of his research remains unpublished, including his findings on required preaching courses. Examining 255 schools who made their M.Div. degree requirements available, Kato found that evangelical seminaries require more preaching courses than their mainline or historically Black counterparts, though fewer than Roman Catholic or Orthodox seminaries. Alex Kato, "Mainline and Evangelical Approaches to Teaching Preaching" (unpublished manuscript, Spring 2017), 6-7.

[2] Kato, "Mainline and Evangelical Approaches to Teaching Preaching" (unpublished manuscript, Spring 2017), 11-13.

concrete, with more self-awareness on the part of the preacher emphasized in mainline settings and more textual skills emphasized in evangelical contexts.

While learning objectives give insight into the goals of the faculty teaching the courses, assigned readings offer concrete indicators of what information is being communicated to students. Several studies have been done to assess precisely what texts are used to build a preaching foundation in the classroom, including *Preaching Magazine's* "25 Most Influential Preaching Books" (2010), Alex Kato's "The Theology Behind the Books We Choose" (2017), and Chris Rappazini's "What Has Been Written: Quantitative Studies on Homiletical Textbooks Used in Seminary Classrooms" (2019).[3] A handful of foundational homiletics texts appear on all these lists: Haddon Robinson's *Biblical Preaching* (originally published 1980), John Stott's *Between Two Worlds* (originally published 1982), Thomas Long's *The Witness of Preaching* (originally published 1989), Bryan Chapell's *Christ-Centered Preaching* (originally published 1994), and Eugene Lowry's *The Homiletical Plot* (originally published 2001). As we will see, each of these texts brings a different emphasis to the art of preaching while also providing instruction on effective exegesis, organizational clarity, and dynamic delivery. Yet, though each propose a different perspective on or approach to preaching, they all share a common grounding in the field of communications and rhetoric. They offer limited practical pedagogical instruction beyond emphasizing the importance of clarity and repetition to make content effective and memorable, an unfortunate omission I hope to amend with my own work.

[3] See Chris Rappazini, "What Has Been Written: Quantitative Studies on Homiletical Textbooks Used in Seminary Classes," *Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* (Sept 2019): 27-45; Alex Kato, "The Theology Behind the Books We Choose," (paper presentation, Evangelical Homiletics Society Conference, South Hamilton, MA, October 2017); Troy Borst, "What are Seminaries Across Traditions Using to Teach the Next Generation of Preachers?" *Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* 15:2 (September 2015): 38-48.

Haddon Robinson's *Biblical Preaching* is a foundational preaching text in both mainline and evangelical schools, although it is most commonly taught in evangelical contexts.[4] Chris Rappazini points out that Robinson's text is "one of the most used books on preaching spanning nearly four decades," having already sold over 300,000 copies and still retaining its spot as a top-selling preaching text.[5] A tireless advocate of clarity in expository preaching, Robinson maintains that effective sermons must focus on a single exegetical idea which can then be crafted into a memorable and compelling homiletical idea. While much of his approach to preaching is rooted in his background in communication theory, Robinson does touch briefly on educational theory when encouraging preachers to identify the purpose of the sermon, which he describes as, "what God desires to accomplish through your sermon in your hearers today."[6] Robinson compares the sermon's purpose to a learning objective in a classroom, writing:

> While preaching differs significantly from lecturing, stating the purpose of a sermon as though it were an instructional objective makes the sermon more direct and effective. … Educators realize that an effective statement of purpose goes beyond procedure and describes the observable behavior that should come as a result of teaching. A purpose statement not only describes our destination and the route we will follow to get there but, if possible, tells how we can know if we have arrived.[7]

Though he does not elucidate the ways lecturing differs from preaching, Robinson does emphasize the value of educational theory in the example of the purpose statement for both clarifying the sermon's purpose and assessing its efficacy. However, he could have

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[4] Kato, "The Theology Behind the Books We Choose," 3-6.

[5] Rappazini, "What Has Been Written," 40.

[6] Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 108.

[7] Robinson, *Biblical Preaching,* 109.

gone further in advocating for the use of educational principles in preaching, even just on the topic of a sermon's purpose. He contends that a clear purpose leads to more concrete applications in the conclusion, but I would suggest that the sermon's purpose could be better supported throughout the body of the sermon using active preaching strategies. Reflection questions or opportunities to share at various intervals throughout the sermon would underscore and reinforce the purpose, increasing the likelihood that the sermon would accomplish its overall goal in its listeners. As Robinson's own maxim is to repeat and restate important ideas as often as possible, it seems reasonable that this same maxim could be applied to the sermon's purpose through the tools of active preaching to better accomplish what God desires to do in the hearers. Although this is a comparatively small example of how active preaching principles could be incorporated into Robinson's text, it illustrates the way educational theory can complement and support homiletic goals.

Sharing a similar commitment to careful Biblical study and expository preaching, John Stott's *Between Two Worlds* invokes the idea of the preacher as a "bridge builder" who "enable[s] God's revealed truth to flow out of the Scripture into the lives of the men and women of today."[8] Rather than offering specific, practical techniques on delivery and style, Stott is more interested in the ethos of the preacher, arguing "preaching can never be degraded into the learning of a few rhetorical techniques. […] The practice of preaching cannot be divorced from the person of the preacher."[9] Though he touches on educational theory briefly, referencing David Gillett's booklet *How Do Congregations Learn?* in his

[8] John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1982), 138.

[9] Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 265.

discussion of structuring sermons and listing educational theorist Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in his selected bibliography, Stott sees preaching as a means to comfort and disturb congregations more than to educate them.[10] Quoting priest and poet Chad Walsh's "excellent definition of preaching," Stott writes, "'the true function of a preacher is to disturb the comfortable and comfort the disturbed.'"[11] Though Stott does not seem to consider education a primary concern of preaching, comforting and disturbing people in a lasting, life-changing way involves offering them new perspectives and information, endeavors that can be effectively supported through educational theory and active preaching techniques.

While Robinson's *Biblical Preaching* is the most commonly assigned preaching text in evangelical seminaries, Thomas Long's *The Witness of Preaching* is the most frequently assigned homiletic text in mainline seminaries, having sold over 66,000 since its original publication in 1989.[12] Acknowledging the differing traditions of idea preaching (in the vein of Robinson) and event preaching (in the vein of Fred Craddock), Long seeks to bring the traditions together, using the metaphor of "witnessing" to describe how preaching is both a personal experience (being a witness) and a testimony to personal experience (bearing witness).[13] Believing that effective witnessing results in "the event of the text's actively shaping self and communal understanding," Long advocates for vivid language and

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[10] Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 228, 345.

[11] Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 314.

[12] Kato, "The Theology Behind the Books We Choose," 3-6, L. Roger Owens, "*The Witness of Preaching* after three decades," *The Christian Century*, December 20, 2017, https://www.christiancentury.org/review/books/tom-long-witness-preaching-after-three-decades.

[13] Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (3rd Ed., Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 114.

examples to make sermons engaging and persuasive experiences rather than informational lectures.[14] Wary of the use of illustration as primarily a tool to clarify concepts, Long contends "illustrative material possesses a much larger communication repertoire than that" and should be seen as a "doorway opening into a larger room of understanding and experience."[15] While Long is a bit vague about how this illustrative doorway contributes to understanding and experience, he nevertheless notes "stories, images, analogies, and experiences are not mere decorations in sermons; they are active ingredients of communication. They cause certain things to happen in the minds of the hearers and are thus powerful, but also potentially disruptive, poetic elements."[16] Long's use of the term "poetic" is telling. While he emphasizes the powerful role illustrations play in persuasion, engagement, and understanding, he sees them as primarily monologic tools for the preacher, not an opportunity for dialogic engagement with the congregation. When he offers possible sources for illustrations, his suggestions all focus on the preacher's perspective and experience, citing the preacher's life, the preacher's imagination, the world around the preacher, and the media as advisable sources.[17] Incorporating active preaching principles and allowing the congregation to illustrate sermons with their own experiences would better align with Long's metaphor of preaching as witnessing by allowing the entire congregation to give witness as well as the preacher. Utilizing active preaching strategies like personal reflection and communal sharing would also help embody Long's vision of

[14] Long, *The Witness of Preaching,* 124.

[15] Long, *The Witness of Preaching,* 230, 247.

[16] Long, *The Witness of Preaching,* 225.

[17] Long, *The Witness of Preaching,* 250-253.

preaching as an "event of the text's actively shaping self and communal understanding" by demonstrating in real time how the text is shaping the congregation's self and communal understanding. Although Long's text remains firmly in the camp of traditional monologic preaching, many of his views on preaching are well suited to incorporating active preaching principles.

Seeing sermons as powerful vehicles for redemptive hope, Bryan Chapell's *Christ-Centered Preaching* contends that effective expository preaching is Christ-Centered preaching, a mode of preaching that *"does not seek to discover where Christ is mentioned in every biblical text but to disclose where every text stands in relation to Christ."*[18] Chapell spends the last third of his book making a case for Christ-centered preaching, laying out a three-step process for Christ-Centered Exposition: (1) identify redemptive principles in the text; (2) determine the application of these redemptive principles for the original hearers; (3) apply redemptive principles to contemporary hearers.[19] Chapell writes, "A truly expository, Christ-centered sermon is not as concerned with the proper location of the cross in a message as with the necessity that each listener walk away from the sermon with a keen awareness of the personal import of God's redeeming work."[20] The personal import of God's redeeming work is a major emphasis in Chapell's approach to preaching yet, as with Long, his model assumes that the preacher must do all the work to create this awareness. According to Chapell, it is the preacher's responsibility to apply the redemptive principles to the hearers, and it is the preacher's responsibility to give them an awareness

[18] Italics original to Chapell's text. Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (3rd Ed., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 242.

[19] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching,* 272.

[20] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching,* 274.

of the personal relevancy of Christ's work. While he makes a strong case for Christ-centered preaching, Chapell's approach is dependent upon the preacher making all the connections to Christ for the congregation, which diminishes the congregation's engagement and deemphasizes their own relationship with Christ. Active preaching principles would dovetail effectively with Chapell's larger redemptive vision by allowing people to personalize the work of Christ by connecting their own experiences to the redemptive principles of the text and sharing these experiences with others, thus truly walking away with a "a keen awareness of the personal import of God's redeeming work" because they identified that personal import themselves.

Offering a distinct and unique approach to preaching, Eugene Lowry's *The Homiletical Plot* argues that a Biblical sermon should be much more akin to a narrative story than an informational lecture. Describing the sermon as "a homiletical pot, a narrative art form, a sacred story," Lowry contends "a sermon is not a doctrinal lecture. It is an *event-in-time*, a narrative art form more akin to a play or novel in shape than to a book."[21] In Lowry's framework, preachers start with a "generative idea" and this generative idea unfolds into a narrative sermon that follows his homiletical plot structure: "1) Upsetting the equilibrium [Oops], 2) analyzing the discrepancy [Ugh], disclosing the clue to resolution [Aha], 4) experiencing the gospel [Whee], and 5) anticipating the consequences [Yeah]."[22] Although Lowry's structure emphasizes the transformational power of experiencing the gospel, his discussion of experiencing the gospel in the sermon is largely theoretical. He

[21] All italics original to Lowry's text. Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form* (Louisville, KY: 2001), xxi, xx.

[22] Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot,* 2, 26.

contends that stage four is often "short circuited" as preachers skip over it to focus on anticipating the consequences of the gospel, but he himself gives little concrete detail as to how to discuss or facilitate the fourth step of his narrative structure.[23] As he writes, "Stages one, two, and three are intended to prepare the way so that when the gospel is then proclaimed it is *effective*—that is, it *does* what it says, and *is* that to which is refers." For Lowry, reading the Gospel is a speech act; speaking the words does the transformative work of the words. He calls it a "point of contact" theological perspective as "the experiencing of the word can occur as *event*." Lowry's emphasizes the experiential and not the educational aspects of preaching, but as I stated at the beginning of this chapter, those elements do not have to be mutually exclusive. Powerful experiences of God often create a desire to know God more deeply and understand the Scriptures more fully. Although he does not reference educational theories or dialogic approaches, both fields could complement his approach to preaching. Pairing his "point of contact" perspective with some active preaching principles to help scaffold the experience by inviting personal reflection and community connection could ensure that more people in the congregation are fully experiencing the "Whee" of the Gospel flipping their perspective and experiences.

These five oft-cited, frequently taught homiletics texts represent some of the most prominent voices currently shaping the next generation of preachers, particularly in an evangelical context. While they all offer valuable theological and practical guidance on preaching, their homiletic strategies are more rooted in the field of rhetoric and communication than in the field of education. These textbooks are focused on creating excellent communicators who can deliver clear and engaging content, rather than effective

[23] Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot,* 74-75.

educators who can help listeners retain the content with research-based methodologies. As I have argued, I believe the call to preaching requires skills and training in both communication and education. Thus, in the next section I will explore what educational research has revealed about the science of learning and how that research could influence our preaching.

Educational Theory: The Science of Learning

As I discussed in Chapter Two, the Biblical text suggests teaching and preaching are mutually necessary, though contemporary preachers have created a false divide between the two. I would like to eradicate this false divide by proposing useful strategies from educational research that can be utilized from the pulpit to help the congregation learn and retain Biblical knowledge. According to the American Bible Society, 78% of Americans interested in the Bible are likewise daunted by reading it, so helping them learn and retain Biblical knowledge is an important and pressing task for preachers who want to address the increasing lack of Biblical literacy and fluency in their congregations and surrounding culture.[24]

For preachers to be compelling communicators and effective educators, they need a better understanding of the differences between communicating and teaching, between clearly expressing information and ensuring that information is retained. However, a better understanding of communication and education first requires a better understanding of the science of learning. In broad terms, learning is broken into three steps: encoding (the initial experience of learning new information), storage (retention of that information in

[24] American Bible Society, *State of the Bible: USA 2021* (E-Book, 2021), 24.

the memory), and retrieval (accessing the information stored in the memory and intentionally bringing it into the conscious mind). For long term learning and information retention, educational researchers believe that retrieval is the most important step. In other words, contrary to popular belief, getting information out of your memory (retrieval) is more important than getting information in (encoding).[25] In *Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning,* Henry L. Roediger III, Mark A. McDaniel, and Peter C. Brown argue, "We are going about learning in the wrong ways, and we are giving poor advice to those who are coming up behind us. A great deal of what we think we know about how to learn is taken on faith and based on intuition but does not hold up under empirical research."[26] Through a combination of neurological research, pedagogical research, and illustrative examples, Roediger, McDaniel, and Brown demystify and demythologize the process of learning, which they define as "acquiring knowledge and skills and having them readily available from memory so you can make sense of future problems and opportunities."[27] Emphasizing the essential importance of retrieval in learning, they maintain retrieval is a "potent tool for learning and durable retention," particularly when that retrieval is effortful and repeated. As they explain, "We're easily seduced into believing that learning is better when it's easier, but the research shows the opposite: when the mind has to work, learning sticks better." When retrieval is repeated, it "not only makes memories more durable but produces knowledge that can be retrieved more readily, in more varied settings, and applied to a

[25] Pooja Agarwal and Patrice Bain, *Powerful Teaching: Unleash the Science of Learning* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2019), 28.

[26] Peter C. Brown, Henry L. Roediger III, Mark A. McDaniel, *Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2014), 21.

[27] Brown, Roediger, and McDaniel, *Make It Stick,* 2.

wider variety of problems."[28] The work of Roediger, McDaniel, and Brown suggests that helping people learn from sermons means asking them to do more rather than less by giving them opportunities in the sermon (or the larger worship service) to retrieve the Biblical knowledge that is being communicated to them. Active preaching principles offer opportunities for this repeated retrieval through personal reflection and corporate sharing that can create more durable retention and thus hopefully improve Biblical literacy.

In *Powerful Teaching: Unleash the Science of Learning,* Pooja Agarwal and Patrice Bain reiterate this emphasis on retrieval as the key to learning, noting, "We tend to think that most learning occurs during the encoding stage, but a wealth of research demonstrates that learning is strengthened during retrieval."[29] Aggarwal and Bain identify four research-based and classroom-proven "power tools" that improve learning: retrieval practice, spacing, interleaving, and feedback-driven metacognition. Retrieval practice (another term for retrieval) involves bringing stored information from our memory to our conscious mind and has been shown to benefit learning by improving engagement and attention, improving mental organization of knowledge, increasing awareness of learning, and increasing the ability to transfer knowledge to other topics or contexts.[30] Spacing, or spaced practice, involves encouraging retrieval practice on multiple occasions over a period of time. Spacing, as opposed to cramming, allows for a little forgetting, which makes retrieval slightly more difficult initially but ultimately strengthens the neural pathways needed to

[28] Brown, Roediger, and McDaniel, *Make It Stick*, 43.

[29] Agarwal and Bain, *Powerful Teaching,* 11.

[30] Agarwal and Bain, *Powerful Teaching,* 25-88.

repeatedly retrieve that information in the future.[31] Interleaving involves reordering or rearranging the content being retrieved without changing the content itself, forcing a person's brain to remember individual elements instead of blocks of content. For example, shuffling flashcards is a common strategy for interleaving, as it reorganizes the content without changing the information.[32] Lastly, feedback-driven metacognition encourages students to reflect on both learning and knowledge gaps through instructor feedback, especially elaborative feedback where the instructor explains why an answer is correct or incorrect. As students tend to overestimate their ability to retain and learn information, Aagarwal and Bain maintain that feedback is essential in helping them recognize holes in their learning or ineffective learning strategies.[33] Giving multiple concrete examples of how to effectively utilize these power tools in the classroom, Aagarwal and Bain strongly advocate that minor adjustments in teaching can result in significant improvement in learning, which likewise suggests that minor adjustments in preaching can result in significant improvement in Biblical learning. For example, Sunday services are ideally suited to practice spaced retrieval and asking congregations to remember elements from last week's sermon or even from a multi-week sermon series helps to solidify the learning that happens during the sermon. Thus, an active preaching strategy like active reviewing, where the preacher invites the congregation to share key points they remember from

[31] Agarwal and Bain, *Powerful Teaching,* 93-106.

[32] Agarwal and Bain, *Powerful Teaching,* 106-119.

[33] Agarwal and Bain, *Powerful Teaching,* 123-152.

previous weeks' sermons, is an effective strategy for leveraging some of Aagarwal's and Bain's "power tools."

Likewise seeking to bridge highly technical research studies on learning with primarily practical instructions on classroom pedagogy, Susan Ambrose and her colleagues offer "a model of student learning that enables them [instructors] to make sound teaching decisions" in their *How Learning Works: 7 Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching*.[34] Defining learning as "a *process* that leads to *change*, which occurs as a result of *experience* and increases the potential for improved performance and future learning," [35] Ambrose and her colleagues explain seven foundational educational principles rooted in decades of educational research. First, Ambrose maintains that accurate and active prior knowledge provides a strong foundation for new knowledge while inaccurate or insufficient prior knowledge impedes learning.[36] Secondly, she and her colleagues contend that creating organized and effective connections between pieces of knowledge helps students better retrieve and apply knowledge.[37] Thirdly, they write that students are most motivated to learn when they perceive the learning to be personally valuable and achievable, while also feeling supported in the learning process.[38] Fourthly, they maintain that mastery in learning comes when students acquire component skills, practice

[34] Susan A. Ambrose, Michael W. Bridges, Michele DiPietro, Marsha C. Lovett, Marie K. Norman, *How Learning Works: 7 Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-bass, 2010), 1.

[35] Ambrose, et al, *How Learning Works,* 3.

[36] Ambrose, et al, *How Learning Works,* 10-39.

[37] Ambrose, et al, *How Learning Works,* 40-65.

[38] Ambrose, et al, *How Learning Works*, 66-90.

integrating them, and know when to apply them.[39] Fifthly, they believe learning happens best when focused on a specific goal and when coupled with targeted feedback.[40] Sixth, they write that the social, emotional, intellectual, and physical environment can either energize or impede learning, encouraging teachers to pay careful attention to the learning environment they are creating.[41] Lastly, they believe that for the students to become self-directed learners, who take the initiative to learn on their own, they need to develop metacognitive processes to self-assess their knowledge gaps, monitor the effectiveness of their approach to learning, and reflect on what still remains to be learned.[42] With their seven principles, Ambrose and her colleagues offer a road map for teachers who want to more effectively support learning in their classrooms and help students become self-directed learners who know how to gather, retain, and critique the information they need. This goal of helping students become self-directed learners does not significantly differ from the church's goal of helping people become mature disciples who know how to gain and retain Biblical knowledge, practice self-reflection, and assess the effectiveness of their spiritual disciplines. Though the content being studied may differ, the metacognitive skills are transferrable, thus the active preaching principles that support these skills can benefit the congregation in a variety of contexts.

While not every educational principle discussed in these texts is applicable or transferable to preaching, the overarching insights into the learning process and the best

[39] Ambrose, et al, *How Learning Works*, 91-120.

[40] Ambrose, et al, *How Learning Works,* 121-152.

[41] Ambrose, et al, *How Learning Works,* 153-187.

[42] Ambrose, et al, *How Learning Works*, 188-216.

practice recommendations can help preachers deliver sermons that are intentionally crafted to help people better learn and retain Biblical knowledge. Learning from a sermon does not have to be a happy coincidence; it can be an intentional outcome of our preaching when homiletical approaches are grounded in both communication theories and pedagogical best practices.

Active Learning: Applying the Science of Learning

Once we have a better understanding of the learning process, we can then explore effective strategies for maximize learning, both in the classroom and in the church. Under the umbrella of effective learning strategies falls the specific techniques of active learning, a mode of teaching that encourages students to move from listening and encoding to regularly retrieving information they've read and heard, thus making them more engaged during class time and better able to retain the information covered in class. As active learning has already been proven effective in the classroom, I believe the strategies and approaches it embodies could be usefully translated into the pulpit to help make sermons more engaging and to support people in learning and retaining Biblical knowledge.

One of the foundational texts that brought active learning discussions into mainstream educational conversations is *Active Learning: Creating Excitement in the Classroom* by Charles C. Bonwell and James A. Eison. Broadly defining active learning as "involv[ing] students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing," Bonwell and Eison identify five principles that support and promote active learning in the classroom: involving students in activities beyond just listening; emphasizing skill development over information transmission; engaging students in higher-order thinking

processes such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation; involving students through reading, discussing, and writing; and emphasizing student investigation of their own beliefs and priorities.[43] They then offer suggestions for ways to modify the traditional lecture by incorporating these principles, such as creating brief pauses in the lecture where students must discuss the topic with a partner, devoting one lecture a week to simply answering student questions, incorporating writing assignments into class time, and creating space in class for debates, role playing, and simulations.[44] After exploring barriers to moving the traditional lecture towards an active learning model, such as faculty resistance, lack of incentive to change, the challenge of large classes, and an overall culture of risk avoidance in academia, Bonwell and Eison conclude that there must be a concerted effort between faculty, faculty developers, administrators, and educational researchers to promote and support active learning in the classroom.[45]

Building on his work with Eison, Bonwell offers practical strategies for incorporating active learning into the classroom in his article "Enhancing the Lecture: Revitalizing a Traditional Format."[46] He encourages educators to structure their lectures with room for: intentional pauses every thirteen to eighteen minutes to discuss the course content with another student; "short writes" where students write for a minute on a subject like "what is the most important thing I learned?" or "what questions do I still

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[43] Charles C. Bonwell and James A. Eison, *Active Learning: Creating Excitement in the Classroom* (Washington D.C.: George Washington University, 1991), 2.

[44] Bonwell and Eison, *Active Learning*, 10-19, 33-52.

[45] Bonwell and Eison, *Active Learning*, 53-65.

[46] Charles C. Bonwell, "Enhancing the Lecture: Revitalizing a Traditional Format," *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* 67 (1996): 31-44.

have?"; ungraded quizzes; asking students to write a summary of the lecture during the last five minutes of class; giving students a blank or partially filled-in outline at the end of class and asking them to fill in the key information.[47] Primarily comprised of practical tips, Bonwell's article takes the research and educational theorizing from his work with Eison and provides simple and clear suggestions to help educators begin to incorporate active learning principles into their lectures.

Looking at active learning from the context of engineering, a field that might seem as foreign to active learning principles as homiletics, Michael Prince offers a thorough investigation of the effectiveness claims of active learning in "Does Active Learning Work? A Review of the Research."[48] Prince divides the broad category of active learning into the subcategories of active learning ("any instructional method that engages students in the learning process"), collaborative learning ("any instructional method in which students word together in small groups toward a common goal"), cooperative learning ("a structured form of group work where students pursue common goals while being assessed individually), and problem-based learning, ("an instructional method where relevant problems are introduced at the beginning of the instruction cycle and used to provide the context and motivation for the learning that follows").[49] After reviewing the qualitative and quantitative research that has been done on active learning since Bonwell and Eison first published *Active Learning*, Prince writes, "there is broad support for the elements of active learning most commonly discussed in the educational literature and analyzed here." Noting

[47] Bonwell, "Enhancing the Lecture," 34-36.

[48] Prince, Michael. "Does Active Learning Work? A Review of the Research." *Journal of Engineering Education* 93.3 (2004):223-231.

[49] Prince, ""Does Active Learning Work?" 223.

that "students will remember more content if brief activities are introduced to the lecture" and "the support for collaborative and cooperative learning calls into question the traditional assumption that individual work and competition best promotes achievement," Prince concludes, "The best available evidence suggests that faculty should structure their courses to promote collaborative and cooperative environments."[50] Though collaborative and cooperative instruction might not seem like the most intuitive methods for effectively instructing a lecture hall of three hundred engineering students, Prince argues that it is in the best interest of student learning to transition from lecture to an active learning approach.

Writing almost twenty years after Bonwell and Eison first released their study, Louis Deslauriers and his co-authors explore why there is continued resistance to active learning in some educational circles. In their article "Measuring Actual Learning Versus Feeling of Learning in Response to Being Actively Engaged in the Classroom," they report that a third of instructors who explore active learning return to traditional lectures because of student complaints. As they explain, "Instructors report that students dislike being forced to interact with one another, they resent the increase in responsibility for their own learning, and they complain that the 'blind can't lead the blind.'"[51] Their study demonstrates that while testing indicates students learn more in active learning classrooms than in the passive lecture context, students perceive themselves as learning more from a passive lecture. Deslauriers and his co-authors conclude that "students who

[50] Prince, "Does Active Learning Work?," 229.

[51] Louis Delauriers, et al, "Measure Actual Learning Versus Feeling of Learning in Response to Being Actively Engaged in the Classroom," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 116, no. 39 (2019): 19251.

are unfamiliar with intense active learning in the college classroom may not appreciation that the increased cognitive struggle accompanying active learning is actually a sign that the learning is effective."[52] Their study gives important insights into the congregational resistance a preacher might experience when trying to incorporate active learning practices into their preaching. Though active learning is a highly effective approach to learning, what is familiar is often preferable to what is effective, especially when there are no pre-tests or post-tests to prove efficacy.

Despite resistance from both students and instructors, educational research demonstrates that active learning is a more effective approach to teaching than passive lecturing, and thus I strongly believe active preaching could be a more effective approach to teaching Biblical knowledge than the traditional monological sermon. While learning is not necessarily the primary or exclusive goal of a sermon, learning is nevertheless an important and needful outcome of a sermon. And if a sermon could become more of an effective vehicle for learning with a few minor adjustments and additions, we would serve our congregations well to explore these adjustments and additions.

Homiletics and Education in Conversation: The Example of Forgetting

To demonstrate the value of utilizing educational research in preaching, allow me to highlight the problem of forgetting. Educational researchers have shown that we lose 70% of what we hear or read almost immediately. Thus, the key to effective learning lies not as much in perfecting information delivery as in interrupting the process of forgetting. To interrupt forgetting, we need to help our listeners move information from short-term to

[52] Delauriers, et al, "Measure Actual Learning," 19254.

long-term memory and then support their brain in developing pathways to access the stored information again later.[53] For homileticians, one of the key strategies for interrupting the process of forgetting is repetition and restatement. A foundational commitment of expository preaching is to rephrase the Big Idea repeatedly throughout the sermon, reiterating it regularly. Robinson encourages preachers to restate their Big Idea frequently and pointedly, explaining that restatement both clarifies the focus of the sermon and makes that focus memorable. As he notes, "Restatement impresses an idea on the listener's mind. If you say something once, it can be ignored, but if you repeat it several times, it will influence a hearer's thoughts and feelings." [54] Chapell likewise affirms, "Restatement uses the principles of focus and redundancy to make a point clear."[55]

As Robinson's work has significantly influenced many contemporary preachers, a similar sentiment was echoed by respondents in my survey on congregational engagement (paying attention during the sermon) and congregational retention (remembering sermon content afterward) (See Chapter 1). Many respondents noted that their primary strategy for helping their congregation retain the sermon content was repetition and restatement. One respondent explained that they have "a one sentence summary I intentionally repeat over and over, hoping the person leaves with this summary sentence etched in their memory." Such responses reflect the commonly held belief that information delivery is the primary avenue for learning and repetition is an essential part of that process.

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[53] Brown, Roediger, and McDaniel, *Make It Stick,* 28.

[54] Robinson, *Biblical Preaching,* 142.

[55] Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 110.

In a similar vein, Randal Pelton and Jeffrey Arthurs reiterate Robinson's emphasis on restatement in their defense of his Big Idea method, noting that a Big Idea skillfully restated "enhances listeners' attention, comprehension, and retention." After quoting Charles Spurgeon, Bryan Chapell, and Timothy Keller concurring with this idea, they add an interesting note:

> This widespread agreement seems to be based primarily on authority and experience. That is, theorists since Plato have asserted the necessity of unity (the voice of authority), and preachers themselves have seen how having it [a Big Idea] enhances attention, comprehension, and retention (the voice of experience). Homileticians would benefit from more rigorous study of this issue—benefits to listeners—with social scientific research.[56]

Though advocates of Big Idea preaching, Pelton and Arthurs nevertheless highlight the lack of quantifiable research supporting the widely held belief that Big Idea preaching improves a listener's comprehension and retention. Preachers anecdotally confirm its effectiveness, but little formal research has been done to undergird these anecdotes. Thus, the actual effectiveness of Big Idea preaching for comprehension and retention is more theoretical than factual.

However, in the field of education, researchers have been investigating comprehension and retention for decades. Their research would suggest that while the expository preacher's commitment to repetition and restatement is indeed invaluable for clarity, it is less effective for information retention. As discussed above, neurological and pedagogical experts agree that the key to memory is not necessarily repetition, but rather retrieval. As Roediger, McDaniel, and Brown explain, "People commonly believe that if you

[56] Randal E. Pelton and Jeffrey D. Arthurs, "The Rewards and Challenges of Teaching Robinson's Big Idea Method" (paper presentation, Evangelical Homiletics Society Conference, Fort Worth, TX, October 2016), 76-77.

expose yourself to something enough times…you can burn it into memory. Not so. Many teachers believe that if they can make learning easier and faster, the learning will be better. Much research turns this belief on its head."[57] Instead, they point out that retrieval practice, which they define as, "recalling facts or concepts or events from memory" is far more effective for building the essential neural pathways that aid in long-term memory.[58] Not only does retrieval practice build and strengthen neural pathways, it benefits the learning process in several other ways, including but not limited to: increasing engagement (since it requires participation); improving the ability to apply the information to other contexts (also known as "transfer"); improving the connections between and organization of stored knowledge; and raising awareness of both what is being learned and what remains to be learned. [59]

If repetition and restatement are effective for clarity but not necessarily for information retention, how could active learning principles be used to improve sermon comprehension and retention? This is exactly the question my model of active preaching seeks to answer by incorporating retrieval practice, collaborative learning, and cooperative learning into the preaching experience. For example, to shift from repetition to retrieval practice, the preacher could ask the congregation to repeat or restate the Big Idea in their own words, either verbally or in writing. Alternately, the preacher could invite the congregation to reflect on times they've experienced the Big Idea in their own lives, causing them to retrieve memories of their own experiences and connect those memories to the Big

[57] Brown, Roediger, and McDaniel, *Make It Stick,* 9.

[58] Brown, Roediger, and McDaniel, *Make It Stick,* 3.

[59] Agarwal and Bain, *Powerful Teaching*, 38.

Idea. Or, at the end of the sermon, the preacher could ask the congregation to identify some specific, actionable ways they could apply the Big Idea in their own lives, encouraging individuals to share their ideas with their neighbors or the whole congregation. All of these potential strategies require the congregation to participate, engage, and personalize the Big Idea, retrieving it from their short-term memory, connecting it to other memories, and helping to ensure the congregation will better remember the sermon not just because of frequent repetition but also because of retrieval practice.

While current homiletics texts prepare students to be powerful and engaging communicators, they do not necessarily prepare them to be confident and competent teachers. Listening is not the same thing as learning, and if preachers want people to hang on to the Biblical wisdom and insights being shared with them every week, they need to better understand how to develop Biblical learners rather than just Biblical listeners. Active preaching offers a pathway to achieve these goals. With small but intentional adjustments in their sermons, preachers can interrupt the forgetting process and help the Big Idea be memorable in ways that are both advocated by homileticians and undergirded by educational research.

Dialogic Preaching & Active Preaching

In closing this chapter, it is important to situate my model of active preaching within the larger field of dialogic preaching. As a subset of dialogic preaching, active preaching shares the goals of engaging the congregation in the sermon as active participants instead of passive listeners through congregational interaction, personal reflection, and feedback. While dialogic preaching focuses broadly on the communication process, active preaching

focuses more specifically on the learning process, thus falling under the umbrella of dialogic preaching but expressing its educational priorities in unique ways. Active preaching is a specific expression of dialogic preaching that focuses on helping people read, retain, and apply Biblical knowledge with the goal of building a Christian worldview

To understand the broader category of dialogic preaching, George W. Swank's *Dialogic Style in Preaching* provides a helpful overview of preaching as a dialogue that engages the whole community. Arguing that contemporary preaching is akin to the Biblical concept of revelation, Swank maintains that preaching is always a dialogue between the people and God, mediated by the pastor. As he writes, preaching "provides a particular setting wherein God and people find themselves face to face. When that happens, people cannot help but make a response." Thus, he concludes, "Preaching, when it is used of God, is always dialogical at its core, no matter what the surface form may be."[60] Swank proposes several ways the preacher can "listen to the congregation," including sermon seminars, post-sermon feedback, and listening carefully to the scripture in the preparation process. Similarly, in their article "Proclamation through Conversation: Dialogue as a Form for Preaching," Jeffrey Arthurs and Andrew Gurevich echo Swank's conviction that preaching is dialogic at its core, defining dialogic preaching as "preaching (and preparing to preach) in a way that encourages the communication process rather than discourages it."[61] While they suggest some similar ways of engaging the congregation in the communication process, they offer a much more expansive list, including question and answer sessions between the

[60] George W. Swank, *Dialogic Style in Preaching* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1981), 38.

[61] Jeffrey Arthurs and Andrew Gurevich, "Proclamation through Conversation: Dialogue as a Form for Preaching," *Journal of the American Academy of Ministry* 5 (1997): 35.

congregation and the pastor, interviews, testimonies, panel discussions, as well as role plays and dramas to name a few.[62]

Preaching becomes active preaching in the interactive delivery of the sermon, but preaching can be dialogic not just in its interactive delivery but also in its communal construction, as illustrated by both Doug Pagitt and John S. McClure. In *Preaching Re-Imagined*, Pagitt advocates for communal sermon creation, offering the example of his own church community where everyone is encouraged to join him for a weekly mid-week meeting to offer their perspective on the Biblical text being preached that Sunday or share their experiences with God. Coining his approach "progressional dialogue" or "progressional preaching," Pagitt writes, "As a pastor I want to be part of a community where the workings of God are imbedded in all, where the roles of teaching and learning aren't mine alone but instead are something intrinsic to who we are as a people. …This concept can—and must—include God's people *being* the church and leading one another in every area of life together."[63] While Pagitt offers a compelling picture of a community working together to construct a sermon that reflects the perspectives and experiences of the larger community and not just the pastor, his text is largely philosophical, arguing for the value of his approach but with little concrete wisdom on how others can replicate it. In contrast, John S. McClure's *Round Table Pulpit: Where Leadership and Preaching Meet* is profoundly practical, offering guidelines and templates for how a pastor can encourage "collaborative preaching" that "involves members of a congregation in sermon

[62] Arthurs and Gurevich, "Proclamation through Conversation," 41-44.

[63] Doug Pagitt, *Preaching Re-Imagined: The Role of the Sermon in Communities of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 23.

brainstorming." In McClure's approach, preaching is "a 'rhetoric of listening' through which the biblical interpretations and theological insights of the congregation find a voice in the pulpit."[64] According to McClure, five things are essential for collaborative preaching: the preacher must function as a host, rather than a sovereign, and invite different interpretations and experiences to be equally shared; the experience must be communal, where the voices of all participants (community members, Scripture, tradition, and congregational heritage) are included; all voices must be equally valued; the conversation should be open-ended and not artificially push for closure; and lastly the collaborative process should be orientated toward the purpose of identifying the implications of the gospel for the community.[65] McClure believes that the preacher should empower the congregation to be full and active participants in the sermon construction process in order to create a sense of empowerment and equality in the congregation and address asymmetrical power dynamics between the pulpit and the congregation. McClure envisions the final sermon as a profoundly communal product, where everyone has had an opportunity to contribute, although the Scripture retains the final authority and the preacher shapes the final product.

Done effectively, dialogic preaching is a powerful tool for engaging the congregation and bringing diverse voices and perspectives into the conversation. However, some practitioners of dialogic preaching can begin to privilege a multiplicity of voices over the singular authority of the Biblical text. Especially when a dialogic approach is cultivated in

[64] John S. McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit: Where Leadership and Preaching Meet* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 7.

[65] McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit,* 51-52.

the context of the New Homiletic tradition, an unfortunate complication can be that the Bible becomes less important than other people's perspectives and experiences of it. As Scott Gibson observes:

> The focus of the sermon becomes human experience rather than the God of the authoritative biblical text and what the text teaches. In addition, there is an overconfidence in homiletical method to bring about transforming experiential events, rather than a confidence in the power of Scriptural truth applied to the heart by the Holy Spirit. The new hermeneutic in the New Homiletic has essentially lost biblical meaning because of the overemphasis on the role of the hearer.[66]

While engaging the congregation's perspective and experiences is important, doing so at the expense of the Biblical text is a fundamental misunderstanding of the function of expository preaching. The exhortation element of preaching is lost when preaching becomes story swapping or perspective sharing, and the learning aspect becomes inconsequential when the Bible is no longer upheld as the norming norm and the sole foundation for Christian belief and living.

This is perhaps active preaching's most valuable contribution to dialogic preaching: it preserves the central emphasis on the Biblical text while also allowing individuals to connect and reflect upon their own personal experiences. When the preacher invites the congregation to share—either individually, within small groups, or with the whole community—every voice gets an opportunity to contribute. When there are opportunities for personal reflection, each individual can make the sermon personal and relevant to themselves and their circumstances without assuming their neighbor does or should share the same experiences and perspective. When people in the congregation share their

[66] Scott M. Gibson, "Critique of the New Homiletic: Examining the Link Between the New Homiletic and the New Hermeneutic," in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, eds. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 81.

thoughts with their neighbor or with the larger congregation, different perspectives are given voice but are shared as perspectives and not reified as equal in significance to the Biblical text. Active preaching upholds the singular authority and centrality of Scripture while also valuing individual experience and addressing asymmetrical power dynamics so that the preacher no longer does all the talking and the congregation no longer does all the listening.

Situating active preaching is the larger contexts of dialogic preaching, educational research, and homiletic training demonstrates the way this mode of preaching gathers tools from multiple different disciplines to assemble a toolbox that will help preachers build sermons that are Biblical, relevant, engaging, and memorable. While active learning is endorsed and embraced in educational circles, its principles have not yet been translated into the pulpit, although the research suggests that doing so could support and promote Biblical literacy more effectively than some of our current approaches.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT DESIGN

To explore effective strategies for improving Biblical literacy, my previous chapters have introduced the concept of active preaching, laid its theological and pedagogical foundation, and demonstrated how active preaching principles could compliment and support current best practices in homiletics. This chapter will move from the abstract to the concrete by exploring how incorporating active preaching principles in our preaching has affected the Biblical literacy of my congregation at St. Timothy's.

Project Purpose

Since my husband Vince and I first planted St. Timothy's in September 2018, we have intentionally utilized active preaching strategies in our weekly sermons. Although we have not necessarily drawn attention to these strategies or formerly labelled our approach as "active peaching" within the context of our congregation, every week we include at least three of these active preaching strategies in our sermons: active reviewing, active listening, active pausing, active writing, active sharing, and active reflecting.

Our reasons for incorporating active preaching strategies in our sermons have been both philosophical and practical. As explained in my previous chapters, we believe a dialogic model of preaching best reflects the Biblical model of preaching. Second, we believe that engaging people in the preaching process results in better attendance, more relational connections within the community, and more personal relevancy of the sermons. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we believe that active preaching strategies help

people better understand, remember, and apply the Bible, thus improving their Biblical literacy.

While we have been able to assess the consistency of attendance and connection within the community by simply tracking attendance each week and watching friendships develop and blossom, it has been much more challenging to assess the effects of active preaching on Biblical literacy. As studies have shown, 78% of those interested in the Bible struggle with significant frustrations when trying to read their Bibles on their own.[1] Thus, for my thesis project I wanted to study the relationship between preaching and Biblical literacy more intentionally, with the hope that I could address some of the frustrations people experience when trying to read, understand, and apply their Bibles.

Therefore, for my thesis project I surveyed members of the St. Timothy's community to assess how active preaching has affected their engagement with the Bible and addressed their concerns around their own Biblical literacy. My main research question was: what are effective strategies for improving Biblical literacy? My thesis is that active preaching strategies will be effective for improving Biblical literacy. The following sections will review my project design, specifically my methodology for constructing and conducting my semi-structured interviews, and then offer a brief overview of my results, which were largely encouraging and strongly supported my thesis.

Methodology

Since 2018, roughly a hundred people have attended a service at St. Timothy's. Some of those people have attended St. Timothy's for a single service, some for a specific

[1] American Bible Society, *State of the Bible: USA 2021* (E-Book, 2021), 24.

season, and others continue to join us virtually even though they have moved away from Connecticut. For the purposes of my research, I wanted to interview people who fit at least two criteria: they had attended St. Timothy's for at least one semester and had attended an in-person service at least once in the 2022-2023 academic year. I prioritized people who had attended our services for at least one semester (roughly fourteen weeks) to ensure that the respondents had experienced enough of our services to be able to reflect thoughtfully on their unique and distinct qualities. I also prioritized people who had attended at least one in-person service in the 2022-2023 academic year in hopes that they would more accurately remember their experiences of the service. I emailed twenty-five people who met these two criteria and asked them to participate in a twenty-minute interview over Zoom. Fifteen people responded and agreed to be interviewed for my research on active preaching at St. Timothy's.

The fifteen people who agreed to participate reflect the diversity of our small community. Of the fifteen interviewees, eight were men and seven were women. Four were undergraduate students, eight were graduate students, and three were professionals. Seven identified as white, five identified as Black, and three identified as Asian. Nine were American citizens and six were internationals students (See Figure 4.1). As one interviewee jokingly observed, "I suspect St. Timothy's will be an interesting case study, because you basically took all the humans who have nothing in common, who are completely different on a daily basis [and put them in the same church]."[2]

[2] Respondent 3

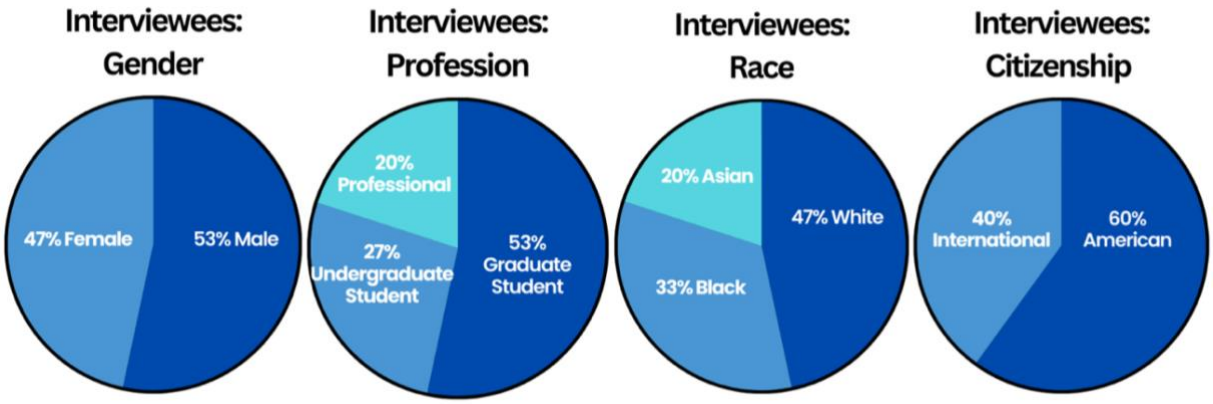

Figure 4. 1: Interviewee Demographics

It is important to note that while my respondents were diverse in some respects, in one respect they were all very similar: they had all chosen to attend services at St. Timothy's. Their largely positive responses to active preaching are in some ways unsurprising as their attendance and participation in the services suggests they either appreciate or tolerate our active preaching practices. Additionally, while not all my respondents attended St. Timothy's consistently or exclusively (two have since stopped attending all together), my respondents all represented a very specific subset of churchgoers: students, academics, and/or partners of academics who are well versed with the seminar style of the university classroom. Reflecting, sharing, and participating are familiar to them as they regularly perform these activities in the classroom. Interviewing a more general cross section of church goers might yield very different results, and thus my final chapter will reflect on how the specificity of my community affected the responses I received.

After scheduling all the interviews, I worked with Linghui Eva Gan, a linguistics researcher and doctoral student at the University of Connecticut, to develop the interview

questions. For her own research on international sign language, Eva does extensive interviews in both the United States and Hong Kong, so she helped me to construct semi-structured interview questions that would both guide the conversation but also leave room for participants to express themselves more fully and freely. Since we don't overtly use the language of active preaching in our services, I did not use the terminology in my interviews, as it would likely confuse the interviewees and result in less helpful responses. As each part of the church service is structured around an active preaching principle, I asked concrete questions about interviewee's experience of the service rather than their understanding of the principle behind the service, knowing that I could apply the interviewees experiences to the principles in my analysis. I considered formatting each question as a Likert Scale to simplify and clarify the results, but since my interviewees had already self-selected into our community and seemingly enjoyed the structure of the service, I decided the narrative feedback of a semi-structured interview would more usefully identify *what* they liked or found helpful about active preaching rather than *if* they liked it or found it helpful.

After much revision, I crafted the following thirteen questions to get a better understanding of our community's experiences of sermons in general, as well as their specific experience of St. Timothy's sermons. The goal of Part A (Sermons in General) was to get a baseline understanding of my interviewee's relationship with and expectations of sermons and to ascertain what factors other than sermons influence their Biblical literacy. Part B (Sermons at St. Timothy's) focused specifically on how each element of our service affects Biblical literacy. For the purpose of the interview, I decided to break down "Biblical literacy," a slightly vague term which could be misunderstood as just reading the Bible, into the more specific questions of whether an element of the service helped them understand

the Bible or helped them apply the Bible to their life. This phrasing seemed a reasonable and accurate interpretation of Biblical literacy because if a person felt they were better able to understand the Bible or better able to apply the Bible to their life because of an active preaching principle then they were effectively improving their Biblical literacy.

Part A: Sermons in General

- Why do you attend church services?
- How important are sermons to you as part of the church service?
- How do sermons affect your relationship with God?
- Other than sermons, how do you learn about God?
- How do sermons affect your relationship with the Bible?
- Other than sermons, how do you learn about the Bible?
- How satisfied are you with your understanding of the Bible? How confident are you in engaging with the Bible on your own?

Part B: Sermons at St. Timothy's

- How are the sermons at St. Timothy's similar to/different from other sermons you've experienced?
- How does our time of reading the Scripture aloud help you engage with the Bible or help you apply it to your life?
- How does our time of sharing about the Scripture as a community help you engage with the Bible or help you apply it to your life?
- How does writing in your bulletins or reflecting on the questions asked in the bulletins help you engage with the Bible or help you apply it to your life?
- How does sharing what you wrote down or reflected on help you engage with the Bible or help you apply it to your life?

- How do guided meditations help you engage with the Bible or help you apply it to your life?

At the end of the interview, I asked interviewees if there was anything they wanted to add that we hadn't yet discussed.

Between December 2022 and June 2023, I conducted the fifteen interviews via Zoom. Each interview ranged in length from seventeen minutes to forty-five minutes. A few interviewees passed on an occasional question because they couldn't fully remember that aspect of the service or they felt they had already answered that question in a previous response, and two interviewees offered such lengthy responses on the initial questions that they ran out of time to answer some of the final questions.

When the interviews were complete, I used an online transcription service to transcribe all the interviews so I could work more closely with the language in each response. Once everything was transcribed, I re-organized all the content by question rather than by individual, so all the responses for each question were grouped together for ease of analysis. The complete responses organized by question can be found in Appendix B.

For the questions about sermons in general (Part A of the interview), I did a thematic analysis of the results, looking for patterns in the responses that I could organize into themes. To do this, I highlighted key, emphasized, or repeated words in each response, counted them, and looked for commonalities between responses. I used these commonalties to group the responses into larger thematic clusters. For the questions about St. Timothy's sermons specifically (Part B of the interview), I did a content analysis, evaluating how helpful or unhelpful each element of the service was by categorizing their

narrative responses into five categories: very helpful, helpful, neutral, unhelpful, very unhelpful. As the response in Part B were often lengthy narratives, I had to do some interpretive work to fit responses into these categories. If the respondent said, "I like it" or used the word "helpful" or a close synonym (useful, valuable, engaging, enjoyable, etc.), I categorized their response as "helpful". Conversely, if they used an antonym for helpful or phrases like "not really," "I don't usually participate," or "I prefer…," I categorized their response as "unhelpful." If they used a modifier (very, extremely, really) with a synonym for helpful or said, "I love it," I categorized their response as "very helpful." If they used a modifier with their antonym for helpful or otherwise expressed strong dislike for that element of the service, I categorized their response as "very unhelpful." If the respondent was vague or noncommittal, saying things like, "Umm, it's okay," or "I'm not sure" or "I don't know," I categorized their response as "neutral." As I was the only interviewer and the only one analyzing the results, the results presented here reflect my perceptions and interpretations of the responses, an unfortunate weakness of my research.

Overview of Results

In the next chapter, I will offer a fuller analysis of the feedback I received in my interviews, but here I will briefly summarize the information I gathered and highlight a few significant responses.

Three general themes emerged for why my interviewees attend church in general: to encounter God and deepen their relationship with Him (9 references), to learn about God and the Bible (7 references), and to connect with a community (5 references).[3]

Of those interviewed, 53% (8) said sermons were the most important part of a church service, 40% (6) said sermons were second to worship or fellowship, and 7% (1) said all aspects of a service were equally important.

When asked how sermons affected their relationships with God, the responses fell into three categories: sermons help them feel a deeper relational connection to God (7 references), sermons help them to know God better (6 references), and sermons deepen their desire to follow and obey God in their daily lives (5 references).

In response to being asked how they learn about God other than sermons, the interviewees most frequently said they learn about God through Bible reading (10 references), followed by learning about God through media sources (social media, Youtube, apps, podcasts, television, movies, music) (6 references), conversations (5 references), devotionals and Bible studies (5 references), prayer and worship (4 references), and life experience (3 references).

When asked how sermons affected their relationships with the Bible, the interviewee's respondents could be grouped into three categories: sermons increase their desire to read the Bible (7 references), sermons help them to better understand the Bible (7 references), sermons help them apply the Bible to their lives (3 references).

[3] For the responses categorized into themes, respondents often referenced multiple themes in their responses, thus the number of references included in the results is greater than the number of respondents.

When asked how they learn about the Bible other than sermons, the most frequent response was through media sources (social media, Youtube, apps, podcasts, television, movies, music) (9 references), followed by conversations (5 references), and devotionals or Bible studies (3 references).

Of those interviewed, 46% (6) felt satisfied with their understanding of the Bible, 38% (5) felt dissatisfied, 8% (1) felt very satisfied, and 8% (1) felt neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Moving into Part B (Questions specifically about St. Timothy's), when asked how the sermons at St. Timothy's were similar to or different from other sermons they've experienced, their responses fell into three categories: the sermons felt more engaging and interactive (10 references), the sermons felt more personal because of the small congregation size (5 references), the sermons felt more reflective and meditative (4 references). The engaging and interactive feature of the sermons was the most frequently referenced, and one interviewee observed:

> But that's why I love, love, love St. Timothy's because it's very interactive. I really do think that it has helped me grow so much in my faith, because […] instead of somebody just telling me what I should think, it gives me a chance to really think for myself. […] It gives you a chance to listen to how God is speaking to you, rather than […] somebody else speaking to you.[4]

Another interviewee observed, "It's more like as I'm being preached to, I'm engaging in the preaching as well. I've never really experienced anything like that before ever."[5]

[4] Respondent 5. Quoted responses have been edited for clarity and brevity. The full responses can be found in Appendix B.

[5] Respondent 7

When asked if our time of reading the Scripture aloud at the start of the sermon was helpful for engaging with the Bible or applying the Bible to their lives, the majority of my interviewees responded positively, with 93% (14) finding it helpful or very helpful and 7% (1) finding it unhelpful (see Figure 4.2). One interviewee observed, "So when we pause, and we try to invoke the Holy Spirit as part of our understanding, I love that, because it allows me to engage and exercise a part of my faith that I wouldn't readily exercise because like I said, I'm always up in my head."[6] The interviewee who found it unhelpful commented, "Initially it's not too much. It's not until we have a little more conversation and those guiding questions that I am able to think a little bit more."[7]

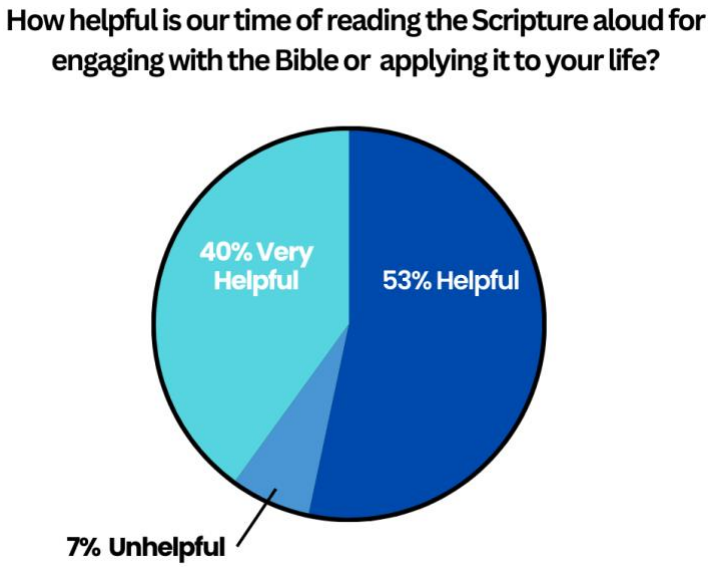
How helpful is our time of reading the Scripture aloud for engaging with the Bible or applying it to your life?
40% Very Helpful
53% Helpful
7% Unhelpful

Figure 4.2: Responses to Part B Question 2

When asked if our time of sharing about the Scripture after the reading was helpful for engaging with the Bible or applying the Bible to their lives, again the response was primarily positive. In response to the question, 92% (12) found it helpful or very helpful

[6] Respondent 10

[7] Respondent 14

and 8% (1) were neutral (see Figure 4.3). One interviewee commented, "It's really helpful to hear what other people have keyed in on. And it doesn't necessarily give me insight on like myself or what I just reflected on but it kind of gives me insight into others and how their experience just differs from mine." Another observed:

> Yeah, it was scary at first. I'm not really a speaker person, but it's extremely impactful because […]it's practice training me to actually speak what's on my heart. Speak what I feel God's telling me in my heart. […] I hear what other people say, and I'm just like whoa, that's completely answering some deep thing I've been praying about, or deep thing I've been thinking about.[8]

The person who was neutral observed, "I think people try to tie their circumstances to Scriptures rather than allowing the Scriptures to shape their view."[9]

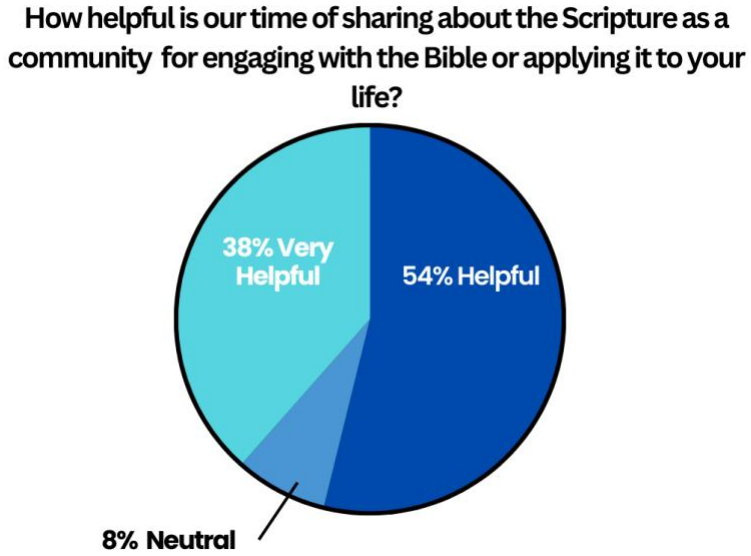
How helpful is our time of sharing about the Scripture as a community for engaging with the Bible or applying it to your life?
38% Very Helpful
54% Helpful
8% Neutral

Figure 4.3: Responses to Part B Question 3

When asked if periodic pauses in the preaching to write in their bulletins or reflect on questions asked in the bulletins was helpful for engaging with the Bible or applying the Bible to their lives, the respondents gave their most strongly positive response, with 94%

[8] Respondent 7

[9] Respondent 12

(14) saying it was helpful or very helpful and 6% (1) saying it was not helpful (see Figure 4.4). One interviewee noted:

> It really helps me because I'm a very hands-on learner; I need to do physical things. Also, I am a visual learner. So being able to write it down [really helps]. And also, I think it could help because I save all [the bulletins]. So it's nice to be able to in a few years from now go back and see how what we were studying at the time affected me then and then how it's affecting me now, […] to see the growth.[10]

The interviewee who found it unhelpful noted, "I would prefer to spend more time in the praying."[11]

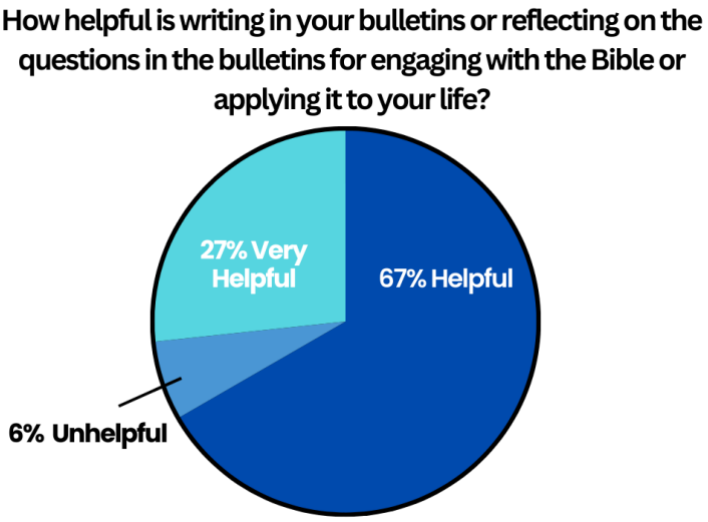
How helpful is writing in your bulletins or reflecting on the questions in the bulletins for engaging with the Bible or applying it to your life?
27% Very Helpful
67% Helpful
6% Unhelpful

Figure 4.4: Responses to Part B Question 4

When asked if sharing what they wrote down or reflected on in the bulletins with a neighbor or the whole congregation was helpful for engaging with the Bible or applying the Bible to their lives, the response was still positive, though this was the lowest category. In their responses, 91% (10) said it was helpful or very helpful and 9% (1) said it was unhelpful (see Figure 4.5). One interviewee observed:

[10] Respondent 2

[11] Respondent 1

> I don't feel the need to share everything. So I would say more having the option to share is helpful for me. Because generally when I do it, it is because I want feedback on something because I don't understand something or because I need to actually say something to make it real. And actually having it out there, you know, makes that commitment, makes it real, and also signals to other people that this is something that I need people around me to care about too.[12]

Another respondent commented on the helpfulness of the sharing while also noting it's limitations, saying:

> I feel like it's helpful if I speak out […] because that means I am declaring and I'm acknowledging loudly. In terms of listening to others, […] I won't say all of them are helpful, because sometimes […] I cannot hear. […] The voices and masks and people have accents. For me, an international student, it is hard for me. But also in terms of resonating, I do not always resonate with people but I know that sharing is so important from my own experience. Once you share, it's helpful, mostly for yourself.[13]

The interviewee who found it unhelpful saw it as more relationally than Biblically oriented, noting, "It has always kind of looked like engaging with the people around you, and kind of like building relationship and being vulnerable with each other and praying with each other. So I just haven't thought about it in relation to reading the Bible."[14]

[12] Respondent 3

[13] Respondent 1

[14] Respondent 13

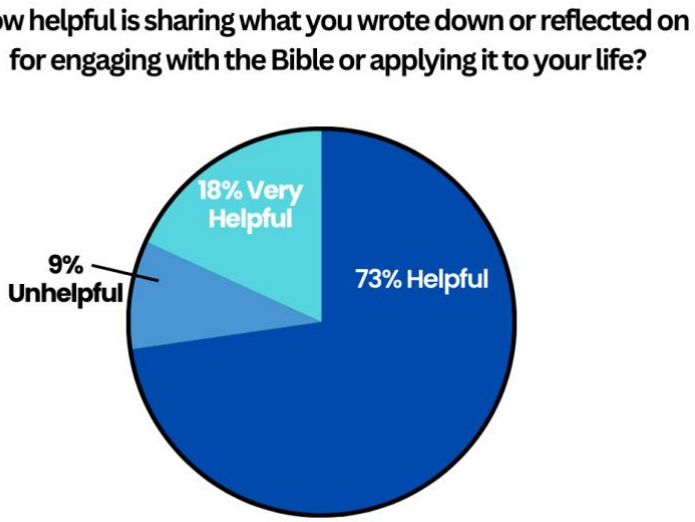
How helpful is sharing what you wrote down or reflected on for engaging with the Bible or applying it to your life?
18% Very Helpful
9% Unhelpful
73% Helpful

Figure 4.5: Responses to Part B Question 5

When asked if including guided meditations in the sermon was helpful for engaging with the Bible or applying the Bible to their lives, the respondents again responded positively, with 93% (13) saying it was helpful or very helpful, and 7% (1) saying it was unhelpful (see Figure 4.6). One interviewee said, "Yeah, those guided meditations always bring me back to the Bible. They make me want to read the Bible a little bit more."[15] One interviewee noted they were helpful, but the amount of time spent in the meditation was sometimes too long, observing, "Often it's hard to time. So I feel like you generally err on the side of more time, because I generally come to decisions quicker."[16] Another interviewee just didn't like meditating, saying, "To be honest, I am not really good at meditating. So it doesn't really help me much just because my mind goes everywhere."

[15] Respondent 7

[16] Respondent 11

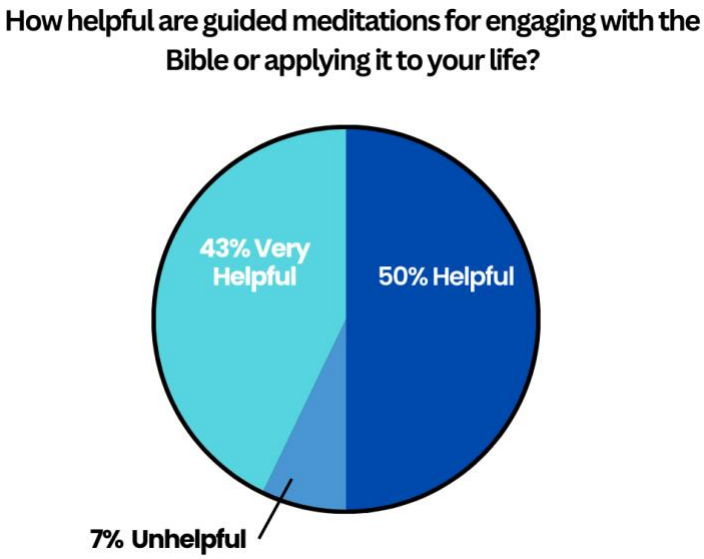
How helpful are guided meditations for engaging with the Bible or applying it to your life?
43% Very Helpful
50% Helpful
7% Unhelpful

Figure 4.6: Responses to Part B Question 6

When asked if there was anything else they wanted to add to the conversation that we had not already discussed, several people elaborated on what was meaningful or challenging for them in the church service. One interviewee commented on how empowering her to engage with the Bible on her own in the service had been particularly significant for her, saying:

> I feel like, at least people in my generation, we're very independent. And we're like, Okay, well, I don't want to be told what to do, which is a blessing and a curse, I guess. I don't want to be told what to do. I don't want to be told what to think. At the same time, you do need some guidance. But I think, just giving younger people that space to be able to think and be like, Okay, well, this is what it could mean [is really helpful].[17]

Another interviewee observed that the distinct preaching style at St. Timothy's takes some getting used to, but he ultimately found the model beneficial for himself and his peers, saying:

> I think there's a little bit of practice, a little bit of a learning curve, just like in meditation. […] But I think the university is a perfect place for trying these things

[17] Respondent 5

> out, I think the demographic plays a huge part in how this is being accepted. […] I feel like this style of service, the style of preaching, the style of consuming the Scriptures, may be the new way that the new generation just needs for it to spread.[18]

A final interviewee highlighted the challenges of an interactive service for those who are less comfortable sharing publicly, noting:

> I think what was hard at first. When I joined in January, I was not feeling comfortable right away to share. And throughout the semester, I've gotten a little bit better. But I think that can be a challenge for people that come new or people that are shy. […] But I think one thing too, about the context of services is that we all might feel a little bit of judgment whenever we give an answer, but in this sense, there's really not a right or wrong answer. It's more sharing your perception and asking questions. And I think the more that [nonjudgmental sharing] can be encouraged, at least it has helped my comfort level.[19]

These additional observations offered valuable feedback, particularly on some of the challenges of active preaching.

Chapter Five will discuss my larger conclusions based on these interviews, but overall it seems that my interviewees found active preaching practices helpful in engaging with the Bible and/or applying the Bible to their lives: 93% found reading the Scriptures aloud at the beginning of the service (which is an application of active listening) helpful; 92% found sharing about the reading of the Scriptures (which is an application of active sharing) helpful; 94% found writing or reflecting on questions in their bulletins (which is an application of active pausing, active writing, and active reflecting) helpful; 91% found sharing about their written reflections (which is an application of active pausing and active sharing) helpful; and 93% found guided meditations (active reflecting) helpful.[20]

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[18] Respondent 10

[19] Respondent 14

[20] Unfortunately, there is not a formal element of our service that translates to active reviewing, so I was not able to receive feedback on that Active Preaching practice. Generally, active reviewing happens in the introduction to the sermon, to review previous sermons.

CHAPTER FIVE

OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSIONS

I began this thesis project with a desire to bring the two halves of my professional life into conversation with each other. As a literature professor at the University of Connecticut, I have been strongly encouraged to use active teaching principles to better engage my students and improve their ability to retain information. As a pastor at a church near the University of Connecticut, I face the seemingly uphill battle of engaging the congregation (largely students) with my sermons and improving their Biblical literacy through my preaching. While Biblical literacy is not the exclusive or even primary goal of preaching, it is nevertheless an important goal, and a particularly important goal as research has shown that 78% of people who are interested in reading their Bibles face significant barriers due to the fact that they don't know where to start reading, find the language too difficult, find the layout too confusing, can't find what they are looking for, and just don't have enough historical or contextual knowledge to make sense of what they are reading.[1]

Standing with a foot in both the world of education and the world of homiletics, it seemed to me that some of the best practices from education could be used to address the problem of Biblical literacy. As my congregation is largely an academic community, it has made sense for us to use academic techniques like active teaching but I wanted to research more fully the strengths and weaknesses of these techniques for improving Biblical literacy. Thus, I began this project with the desire to explore how active teaching principles

[1] American Bible Society, *State of the Bible: USA 2021* (E-Book, 2021), 24.

could be translated into a homiletical context or, more concretely, how active preaching has affected the Biblical literacy of my congregation, St. Timothy's.

While my study has had some significant limitations, which I will discuss in greater detail later in this chapter, the overall findings for my specific congregation have been encouraging personally and promising professionally. Through semi-structured interviews, I learned that my congregation had an overwhelmingly positive response to active preaching. Their self-reported assessment of the effects of active preaching confirmed my thesis that active preaching practices have improved their Biblical literacy.

This final chapter will explore more deeply the responses to my interviews, discuss how the limitations of my study affected these responses, and reflect on the further implications of my study for both my congregation and the larger field of homiletics.

Major Findings

Chapter 1 coined the phrase "active preaching," and identified six active preaching practices that can be utilized in a variety of ways throughout a sermon:

1. **Active Reviewing:** Instead of the preacher reviewing the previous sermon(s) at the beginning of his/her message, the preacher invites the congregation to share key points they remember from the previous week(s), encouraging the congregation to more intentionally remember and engage with previous messages.
2. **Active Listening:** After reading the Scripture aloud, the preacher invites the congregation to write down any words, phrases, or ideas that stood out to them and any questions the passage raises for them. Actively listening to the Scripture

passage both engages the whole congregation in the Scripture reading and personalizes the passage for each individual.

3. **Active Pausing:** Periodically throughout the sermon, the preacher can pause and ask the congregation to respond to a question in writing, verbally to the people around them, or verbally to the whole congregation. Alternately, the preacher can ask what questions have emerged for the congregation. The pause re-engages the congregation's attention and models intentional engagement with the Scriptures.
4. **Active Writing:** At various intervals throughout the sermon, the preacher can ask the congregation to personalize a Biblical concept by writing down questions, personal applications, personal prayer requests, etc. The act of writing will re-engage listener's attention, clarify personal relevancy, and surface questions.
5. **Active Sharing:** During the sermon, the preacher can ask the congregation to discuss a Biblical concept or sermon point with another person or group of people. The Think-Pair-Share model is popular in the classroom context because it re-engages the listener's attention and builds community.
6. **Active Reflecting:** During the sermon or near the end, the preacher can ask the congregation to reflect on one major take away from the sermon or lead the congregation in a guided meditation that applies the sermon to their lives. This will aid in memorizing and internalizing the passage and allows the congregation to generate their own applications that are uniquely relevant to them.

Within my context of St. Timothy's, these strategies are applied when we read the Scriptures aloud at the beginning of the sermon (active listening), share corporately about the reading of the Scriptures (active sharing), write or reflect on questions in the bulletin

throughout the sermon (active pausing, active writing, active reflecting), share corporately about our written reflections (active pausing, active sharing), and end the sermon with a guided meditation or questions for reflection (active reflecting).

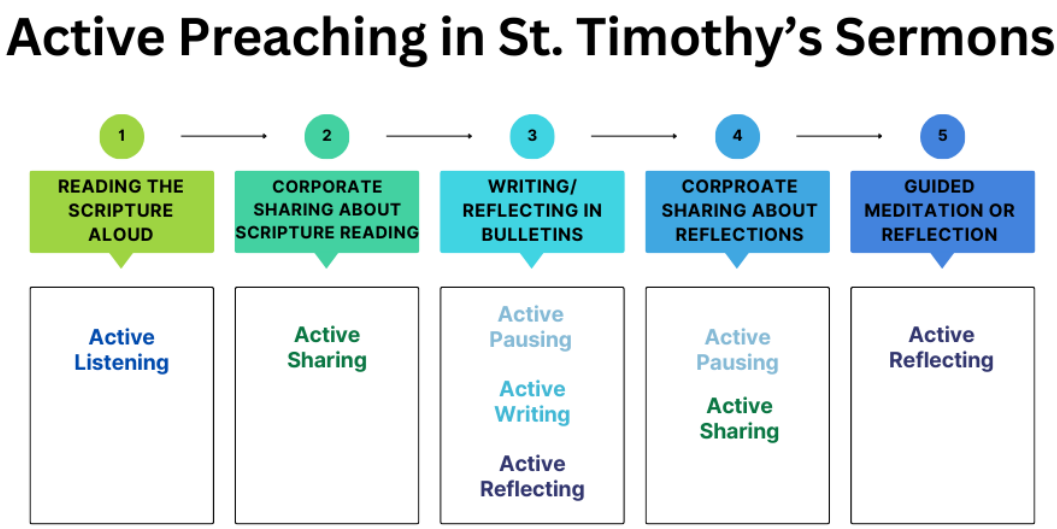

Figure 5.1: Active Preaching in St. Timothy's Sermons

Although we don't explicitly label these parts of the service verbally or in the bulletin, nor do we talk at length about our active preaching approach, every sermon intentionally includes five of the six active preaching strategies (active reviewing happens less frequently and less consistently and was thus not included in this study).

Through my semi-structured interviews of 15 people who regularly attended our services in the 2022-2023 academic year, I discovered that our community finds writing or reflecting on questions in their bulletins most valuable (active pausing, active writing, active reflecting), with 94% of my interviewees saying this was helpful for their Biblical literacy. Furthermore, 93% said guided meditations (active reflecting) were helpful, 93% said reading the Scriptures aloud at the beginning of the sermon (active listening) was helpful, 92% said sharing about the reading of the Scriptures (active sharing) was helpful,

and 91% said sharing about their written reflections (active pausing, active sharing) was helpful.

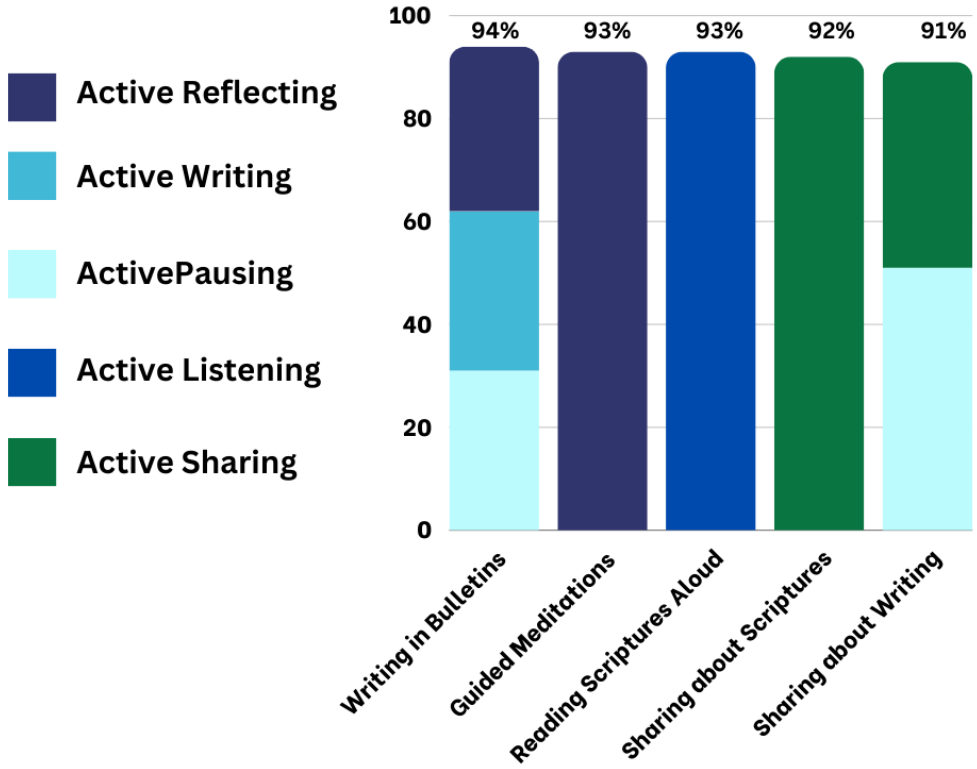

Figure 5.2: Major Findings

The results of my interviews suggest that active reflecting, active writing, active pausing, and active listening are the most valuable strategies for improving Biblical literacy, while my interviewees found active sharing slightly less helpful. My interviewees most frequently described meaningful personal experiences related to active reflecting, active writing, active pausing, and active listening, praising the corresponding parts of the service for increasing their desire and ability to read, understand, and apply their Bibles. Though 91% of my interviewees found active sharing helpful for understanding how Scripture could speak differently to different people and for giving them the opportunity to express their testimony, they also detailed more difficulties associated with corporate

sharing: difficulty hearing each other, difficulty connecting with the point other people were trying to express, and difficulty with shyness. While several people mentioned their anxiety about sharing publicly, they noted sharing their personal perspective instead of being quizzed on factual information made the experience slightly easier, as there is not necessarily a right or wrong perspective. The feedback on active sharing has given me valuable insight into ways I can reframe or restructure our times of active sharing to make it less daunting and more useful for supporting Biblical literacy.

Interestingly, three of these active preaching strategies—active reflecting, active writing, and active listening—share a significant commonality: they encourage people to connect personally with the Scripture. Whether they are listening to the Scripture read aloud, writing a response to the Scripture in the bulletin, or participating in a meditation that guides them through the Scripture, people are experiencing the Scriptures speaking to them specifically. Whereas in standard homiletics, the preacher is trained to offer illustrations that hopefully resonate, these active preaching strategies encourage people to illustrate the sermon with their own experiences, which will invariably resonate on a deeper level. The same is true for another facet of homiletics—application. In standard homiletics, the preacher is trained to offer concrete applications for the sermon that people can apply to their lives, but when people are writing and reflecting on the sermon in the service, they are applying the sermons to themselves for themselves. These strategies thus alleviate some of the pressure on preachers to make sermons relevant to diverse congregations and allows each individual to connect personally with the sermon and the Scriptures. My interviewees responded very positively to the relevancy and immediacy of active reflecting, active writing, and active listening, with one interviewee saying:

> the interactive part really does help me because it helps me to see okay, how do I feel about this? Instead of somebody just telling me what I should think, it gives me a chance to really think for myself and be like, this is how I feel God is speaking to me, which I think is very important because it gives you a chance to listen to how God is speaking to you, rather than somebody else speaking to you.[2]

Notably, active pausing creates space for these personal encounters by interrupting the monological flow of the sermon to give people time to reflect, respond, and apply the Scriptures. Active pausing is more of a structural strategy, while active reflecting, active writing, and active listening focus more on the content of the sermon, and all five strategies work together to create the overall active preaching experience, in which people are intentionally and personally engaging the Scriptures, thus increasing their retention of the Scriptures and improving their Biblical literacy.

Limitations of the Study

While my interviewees' enthusiastic response to the effects of active preaching on their Biblical literacy was encouraging to me as a preacher and useful to me as a researcher, there were considerable limitations to my study.

Firstly, with 15-20 people on a Sunday, St. Timothy's is a particularly small congregation, perhaps more akin to a small group or home church. The level of corporate sharing that is possible with 15 people changes notably as the number of people increases, so the positive feedback I received on our times of corporate sharing might be significantly different in a larger church. Even in our own context, where people are primed and prepared to share, on weeks where there are 25 or 30 people, many of our regular attenders are less likely to share and longer periods of silence occur before anyone raises

[2] Respondent 5

their hand or their voice. Because of our small size, we have primarily focused on corporate sharing, but larger congregations or congregations where people are uncomfortable with public speaking might need to focus on individual reflection or sharing in small groups.

Secondly, all the people I interviewed were undergraduate students, graduate students, the significant others of graduate students, or faculty members. Everyone who participated in my study was familiar with the educational practices that undergird active preaching and was accustomed to participating in a learning environment. As they are expected to actively participate in their classes during the week, they are likely more prepared and equipped to actively participate in a sermon on Sunday than an average non-student might be. Additionally, as most of our congregation is in their teens and twenties, they do not necessarily come to church on Sunday with decades of expectations about what a church service "should" be like. On the whole, they are more flexible and open to innovation, which may not be true in the case of older or historic congregations. Active preaching might fit most naturally in younger congregations, and especially younger congregations in college towns, although many of the strategies are adaptable and can be ramped up or down for different contexts. Reflections can be done individually in each person's bulletin, they can be shared with a neighbor or small group of neighbors, they can be shared corporately with the whole congregation, or they can be tweeted or messaged to the pastor to share with the whole congregation. Active preaching strategies can be as obvious or subtle, as high tech or low tech, as individual or corporate as a preacher needs for their particular context.

Thirdly, everyone who participated in my study had already attended at least fourteen services at St. Timothy's and therefore appreciated the preaching style enough to

continue coming for at least an entire semester. We are not large enough to be the "cool church" in town, so each of the fifteen people in my interview had already demonstrated that they found our model of preaching beneficial (or at least not detrimental) by consistently attending our services. Thus, they were already primed to give me positive feedback on the services, unlike people who experience active preaching for the first time. Additionally, I have warm, personal relationships with the majority of the interviewees, which again predisposes many of them to give gracious and generous feedback. Though I encouraged everyone to be as honest as possible for the sake of my research, it might have been difficult for them to be critical of the services to my face. Anonymous written surveys might have given me more honest feedback, but I chose to do semi-structured interviews because I was concerned that my participants might not fully understand the questions and/or they might rush through their written responses and not provide the detail that I needed.

Finally, and relatedly, all the interviews and analyses were done by me, and I have little formal training in creating, conducting, and coding semi-structured interviews. Although I received guidance and feedback from Dr. Auday and others, my questions may not have addressed or accessed the effects of active preaching as effectively as I might have hoped, especially as I had never intentionally discussed or explained active preaching to my congregation before. Additionally, I only interviewed people from our congregation, so I have no test cases to compare how other people who have not already experienced active preaching might respond to similar questions. Lastly, since I was the only one coding and interpreting the data, I had no one to compare or contrast my analyses with to see if I was correctly or incorrectly categorizing the responses I received. While I tried to follow clear

and consistent guidelines in my coding, it would have been helpful to discuss the results with someone else who had likewise coded the interviews following the same guidelines.

While none of these limitations disqualify my study or my results, they are certainly important considerations to keep in mind as I further explore my results.

Further Implications

One of the most obvious implications of this study for my congregation is that we should continue using active preaching strategies in our sermons. In their interviews, members of the congregation consistently self-reported that active preaching had positively affected their Biblical literacy, helping them to better understand the Bible and more effectively apply the Bible to their lives. While Biblical literacy is a difficult thing to assess objectively, short of exams or pop quizzes, our interviewees expressed a greater sense of desire to read the Bible and confidence in their ability to understand it. As one interviewee said, "There were times before I came to St. Timothy's where I was kind of ehhhh about reading the Bible. You know, life just gets in the way. But I go to St Timothy and it's like this is the real deal, this is the book of life for real. It's almost given me renewed passion to read the Bible."[3] While our application of these strategies can be tweaked in various ways, such as shifting to small group sharing instead of corporate sharing and focusing on personal sharing rather than information regurgitation, active preaching is working well in our context not just for encouraging attendance and building relational connections but also for improving the Biblical literacy of our congregation.

[3] Respondent 7

However, I do think we need to be more explicit about our active preaching approach and use the language of "active preaching" more directly in our services and on our website. Most of my interviewees did not realize we were intentionally utilizing a different model of preaching; they knew our services were different, but they didn't know why. Explaining the benefits of active preaching more publicly and consistently in our congregational context can help demystify and popularize our approach. It can also help clarify for visitors that we are not just a small, quirky church trying to be different for difference's sake; we are intentionally using educational best practices to make our preaching engaging and effective.

Though my study was small and localized, there are nevertheless a few takeaways that could be valuable for the larger field of homiletics. My research supports and aligns with other studies that have emphasized the importance of personal engagement with the Scriptures. The American Bible Society (ABS) found that 91% of "Practicing Christians," a category that describes people who identify as Christian, attend at least one religious service a month, and believe their faith is important in their lives, wish they read their Bibles more.[4] Because they feel they don't have enough time to read the Bible or they don't know where to start when reading the Bible, their Bible reading suffers. Yet research has likewise shown that Bible reading is one of the most significant ways that people feel close to God and it has a powerful impact on their desire to know God more deeply. According to ABS, across Evangelicals, Mainline Christians, Catholics, and historically Black Protestants,

[4] American Bible Society, *State of the Bible,* 161, 153.

85% of Practicing Christians feel more connected to God when they are reading their Bibles and 89% say reading their Bibles makes them want to know more about God.[5]

While these studies show that a significant majority of American Christians across denominations wish they were reading their Bibles more frequently and feel more deeply connected to God when they are reading their Bibles, the research does not offer strategies for supporting Bible reading beyond finding a Bible reading plan or joining a Bible study. Reading plans and Bible studies are valuable additional tools, but the first step for encouraging Bible engagement with people who regularly attend a church service is to model Bible engagement in their church service. My research and interviews indicate that inviting the congregation to actively engage with the Scriptures in the service, whether through personal reflection, individual writing, or corporate sharing, both improves their Biblical literacy and their enjoyment of the service. My interviewees repeatedly commented on the way active preaching "personalized" the Scriptures for them, keeping them engaged and interested in the sermon because the scriptures felt especially relevant to them. As one respondent noted, while Scripture is often read in church, it's not necessarily framed in a way that invites the congregation to engage with it, saying "sometimes in churches, is it just like, 'we're going to read this passage.' And we're all like 'Yay!' but there's no real sense of what am I supposed to do with it? Am I just listening to it because I know we're about to have a sermon on it?"[6] With the intentional framing of active preaching, the congregation is invited to listen expectantly for God to connect with them in or through the Scripture reading, which deepens their engagement with the Scripture in

[5] American Bible Society, *State of the Bible,* 166.

[6] Respondent 3

the service and hopefully beyond. As another respondent observed, "[active preaching] gives you an opportunity to be immersed in the [Biblical] story, to personalize it. […] It gives me the chance to think if this word is for me, what is it saying to me? How is it making me feel?"[7] If people are longing to connect with God more through the Bible, yet feel they don't have time read the Bible in their daily life, but attend church regularly, the obvious place to help them engage more with the Bible is their church service, and active preaching provides preachers the tools to move from Scripture reading to Scripture engagement, from listening to a sermon to connecting with God's word.

Notably, the one suggestion that ABS does provide to pastors to support Bible reading and engagement in their congregations is to reach out to other pastors. As they recommend, "consider inviting your neighboring pastor to speak at your church, introducing your congregation to a Bible engagement practice they might find new, interesting, or refreshing," [8] While this sounds like a promising suggestion, is assumes that other pastors will have strategies for Bible engagement, yet my research indicates that this is not necessarily a good assumption. In Chapter One, I interviewed forty-one pastors about their approaches to preaching, and only 52% felt they had effective tools and strategies for helping their congregation retain Biblical knowledge (compared to 85% who felt they had effective tools and strategies for engaging their congregation's attention during sermons). Many pastors are skillful and engaging speakers, but they haven't necessarily been given the tools or training to effectively support Biblical literacy and engagement in their congregations.

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[7] Respondent 10

[8] American Bible Society, *State of the Bible,* 177.

Rather than turning to another pastor who feels equally underprepared to support and encourage Biblical literacy, training in active preaching could help fill the gap for preachers who are unsure about how to improve Biblical literacy and engagement in their own congregations. The strategies in active preaching are easy to modify, so they can be contextualized for a wide variety of congregations and preaching styles. For example, active writing can be as simple and standard as filling in a blank on a sermon outline, which many congregations already do, or as lengthy and in-depth as congregants writing out their own prayers or next steps at the end of the service. The learning benefits that come from active writing depend less on what is written and more on the act of writing itself, which improves the storage of long-term memories more effectively than listening alone does. Alternately, nearly all active preaching activities can be done individually, in a small group, or as a whole church, depending on the desires and needs of each congregation. Preachers can also choose to incorporate one or two active preaching strategies without including them all, changing what strategies they use week to week or as appropriate for each service. Essentially, active preaching provides preachers with a toolbox of strategies that they can use as appropriate to support Biblical literacy and engagement in their congregations.

Concluding Thoughts

Researching and writing this thesis has only increased my commitment to active preaching. Theologically, it embodies many of the interactive and reflective qualities of Jesus's preaching ministry. Practically, it gives preachers tools to become more effective teachers of God's word, thus improving the Biblical literacy of their congregations. And

personally, witnessing people's transformative experiences when they engage deeply and individually with Scripture reaffirms my sense of vocation because I see first-hand the life-changing impact of skillful preaching (and teaching).

While there is certainly much more ground to cover and research to do, this thesis project had laid the foundation for what I hope is a lifelong advocacy of active preaching. I would love to continue to develop and refine active preaching strategies and share these tools with other preachers. I would also like to continue my research by working with people outside of St. Timothy's to assess their responses to active preaching. Ultimately, I would like to turn my research into a book and share active preaching strategies more broadly and efficiently.

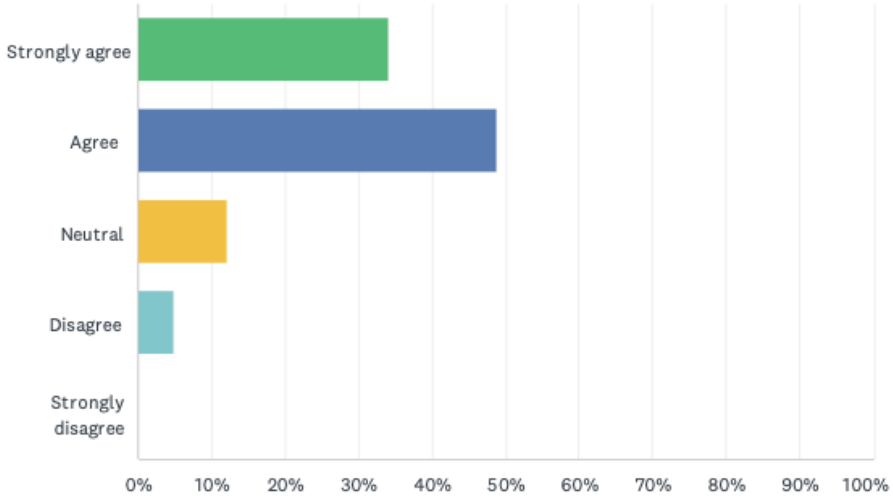
In the meantime, I carry with deepened conviction Paul's words to Timothy is 1 Timothy 4:13-15: "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress." I hope that the St. Timothy's community has seen my progress as my preaching gifts have deepened and matured throughout my D.Min program and that the field of homiletics will benefit from my diligence in developing and exploring active preaching.

APPENDIX A

CONGREGATIONAL ENGAGEMENT & RETENTION IN PREACHING SURVEY RESULTS

Q1 Preaching is the primary tool for teaching Biblical knowledge in my congregation (or a congregation where I preach).

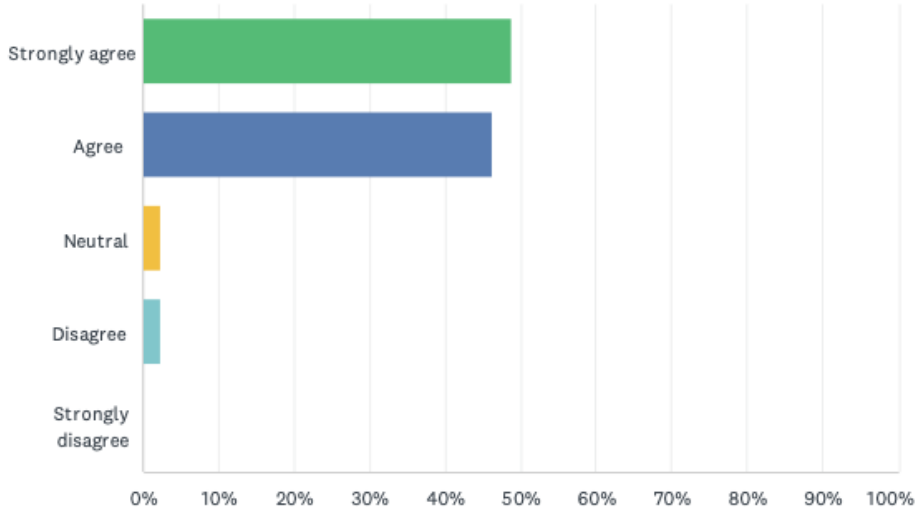
Answered: 41 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly agree	34.15%	14
Agree	48.78%	20
Neutral	12.20%	5
Disagree	4.88%	2
Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
TOTAL		41

Q2 Congregational engagement (members of the congregation paying attention during the sermon) is important for effective preaching.

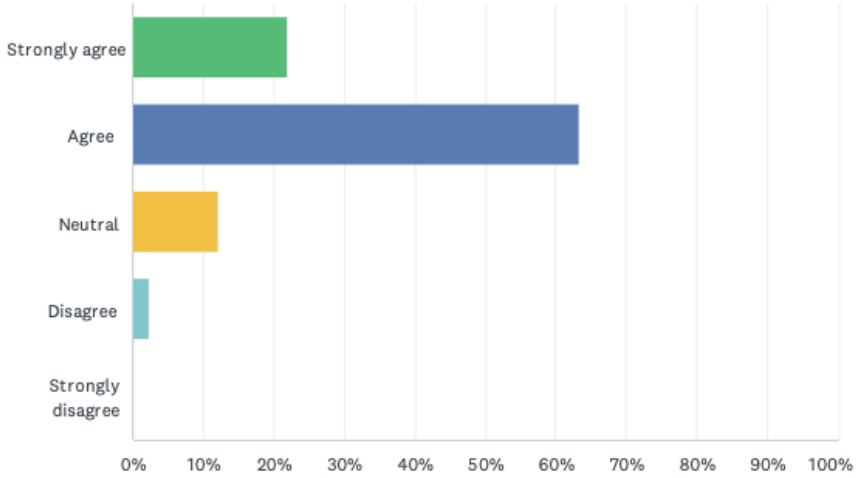
Answered: 41 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly agree	48.78%	20
Agree	46.34%	19
Neutral	2.44%	1
Disagree	2.44%	1
Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
TOTAL		41

Q3 Congregational retention (members of the congregation remembering sermon content afterwards) is important for effective preaching.

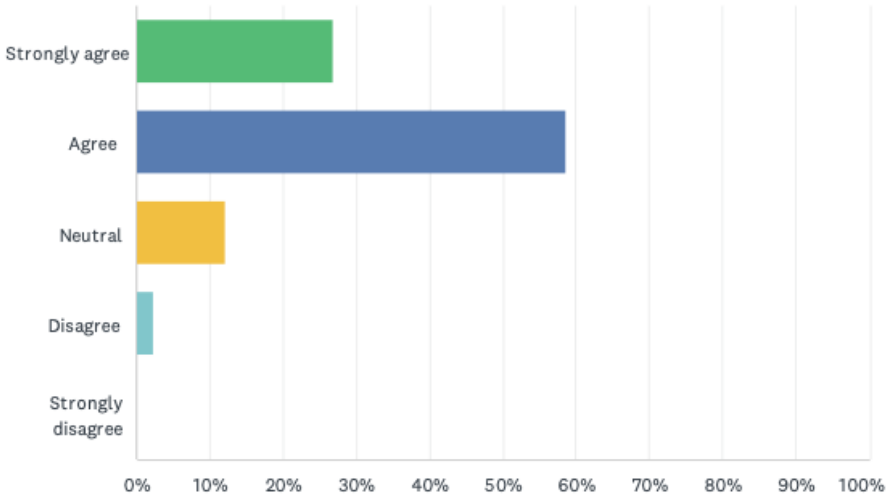
Answered: 41 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly agree	21.95%	9
Agree	63.41%	26
Neutral	12.20%	5
Disagree	2.44%	1
Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
TOTAL		41

Q4 I have effective tools and strategies to engage my congregation (or a congregation where I preach) in my preaching.

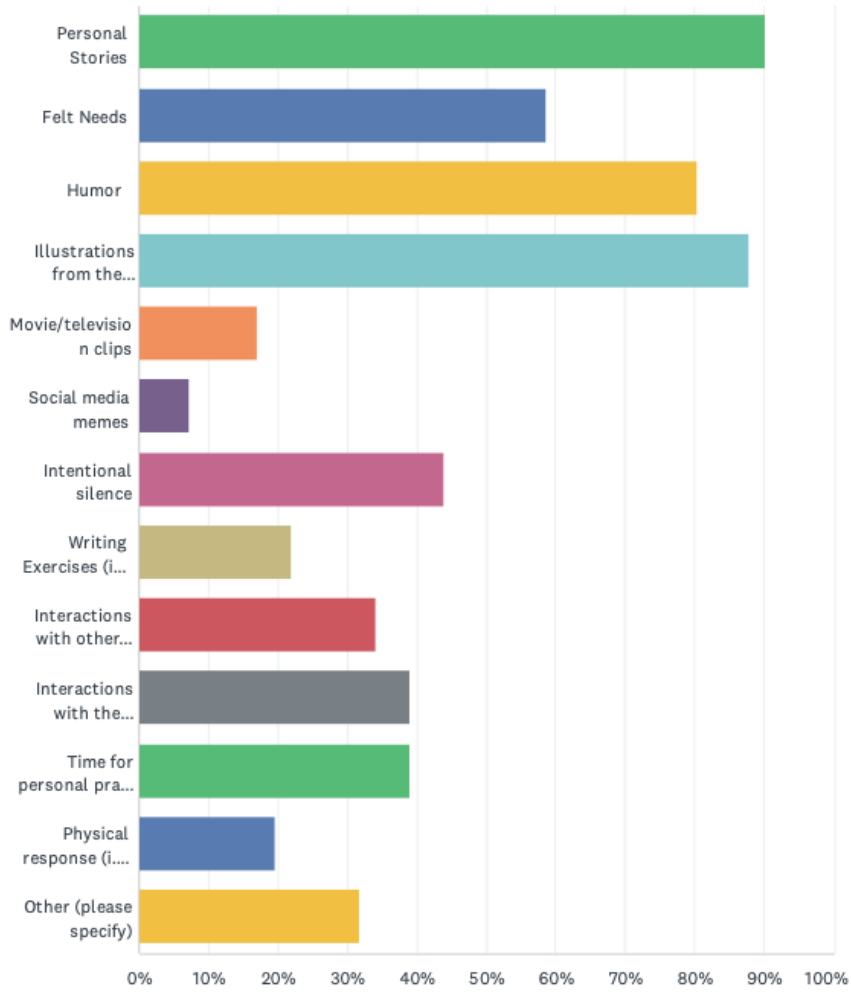
Answered: 41 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly agree	26.83%	11
Agree	58.54%	24
Neutral	12.20%	5
Disagree	2.44%	1
Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
TOTAL		41

Q5 To engage congregation attention when I am preaching, I use:

Answered: 41 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Personal Stories	90.24%	37
Felt Needs	58.54%	24
Humor	80.49%	33
Illustrations from the surrounding culture	87.80%	36
Movie/television clips	17.07%	7
Social media memes	7.32%	3
Intentional silence	43.90%	18
Writing Exercises (i.e. fill-in-the-blanks, note-taking, writing prompts)	21.95%	9
Interactions with other members of the congregation (i.e. sharing with a neighbor, etc)	34.15%	14
Interactions with the preacher (i.e. "somebody say amen," q&a, etc)	39.02%	16
Time for personal prayer (i.e. "take a moment and talk to Jesus about..")	39.02%	16
Physical response (i.e. "come up to the altar", "get down on your knees", etc)	19.51%	8
Other (please specify)	31.71%	13
Total Respondents: 41		

"Other" Responses to Question #5

noting how physical responses built into Christian liturgy enact Scripture, and invite them to deeper understandings of what they therefore are already participating in

3/29/2022 2:01 PM View respondent's answers Add tags

Using the principles found in the book, Made to Stick

3/24/2022 2:00 PM View respondent's answers Add tags

Artistic images, complementary liturgies and hymns

3/24/2022 1:27 PM View respondent's answers Add tags

Email reminders, Services on YouTube

3/22/2022 11:10 PM View respondent's answers Add tags

I always have a one sentence summary which I intentionally repeat over and over in my sermon. Hoping the person leaves with this summary sentence etched I'm their memory.

3/15/2022 1:10 PM View respondent's answers Add tags

slides and quotes

3/14/2022 1:15 PM View respondent's answers Add tags

Notes on screen

3/11/2022 3:31 PM View respondent's answers Add tags

I provide copies of my manuscript for parishioners to take home and engage with during the week.

3/11/2022 12:59 PM View respondent's answers Add tags

reach parents by preaching to their children

3/10/2022 4:33 PM View respondent's answers Add tags

low-tech visuals; delivery that has variety (movement, vocal variety)

3/10/2022 3:04 PM View respondent's answers Add tags

Visual prompts thru PowerPoint slides, Questions for them to consider, "Homework" assignments

3/10/2022 1:35 PM View respondent's answers Add tags

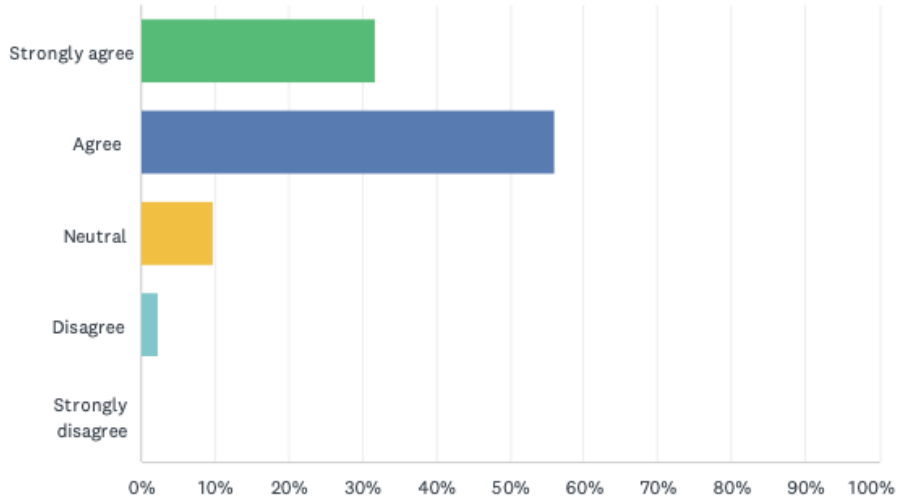
repetition

3/10/2022 1:06 PM View respondent's answers Add tags

Encourage use of chat on zoom for online services, during sermon/message

Q6 I would like to learn new strategies to engage my congregation (or a congregation where I preach) in my preaching.

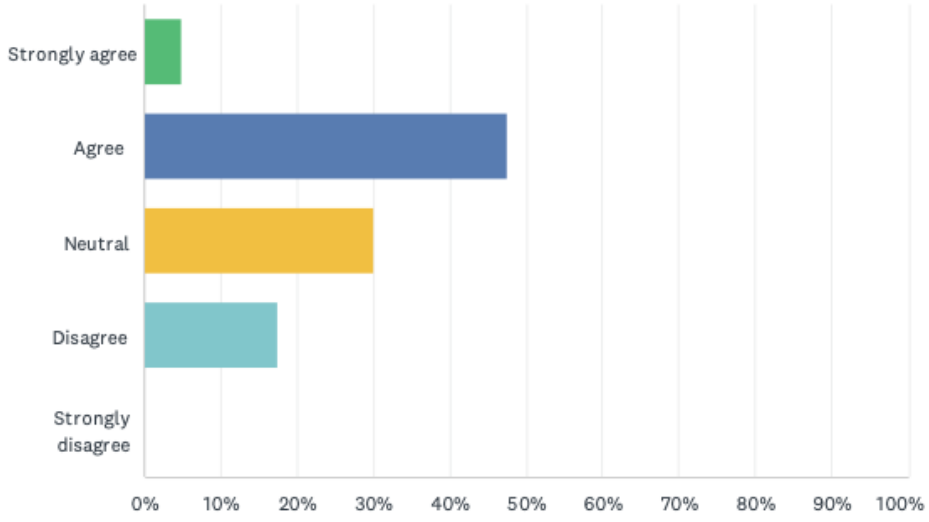
Answered: 41 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly agree	31.71%	13
Agree	56.10%	23
Neutral	9.76%	4
Disagree	2.44%	1
Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
TOTAL		41

Q7 I have effective tools and strategies to help my congregation (or a congregation where I preach) retain Biblical knowledge after the sermon.

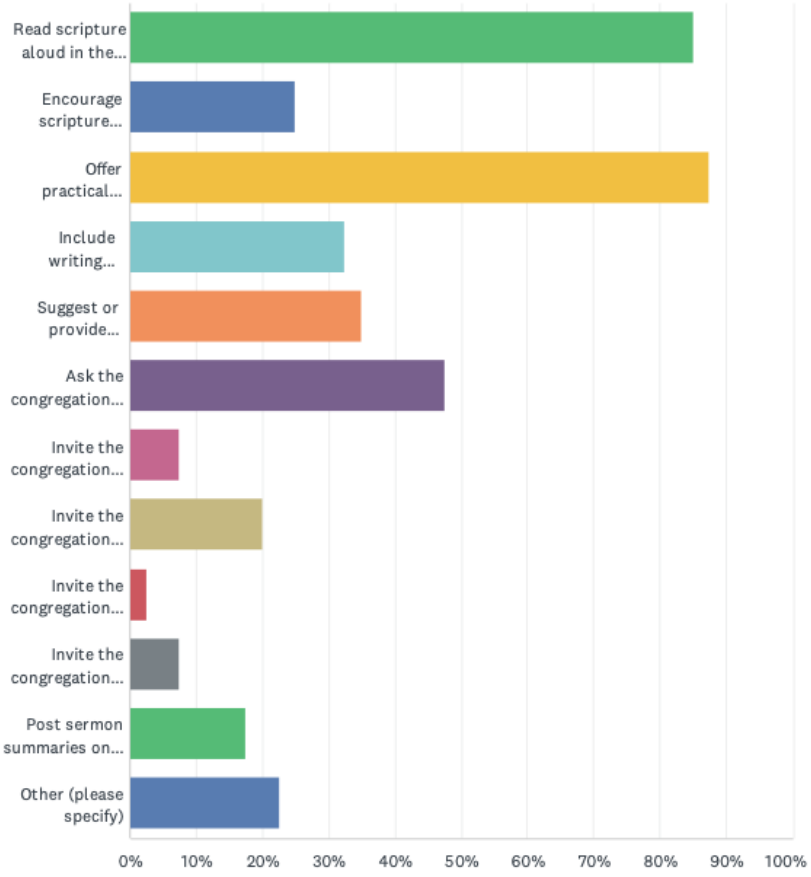
Answered: 40 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly agree	5.00%	2
Agree	47.50%	19
Neutral	30.00%	12
Disagree	17.50%	7
Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
TOTAL		40

Q8 To help my congregation (or a congregation where I preach) retain Biblical knowledge after the sermon, I

Answered: 40 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Read scripture aloud in the service	85.00%	34
Encourage scripture memorization	25.00%	10
Offer practical applications in my sermons	87.50%	35
Include writing exercises in my sermon notes (i.e. fill-in-the-blanks, note-taking, writing prompts)	32.50%	13
Suggest or provide additional resources for further study	35.00%	14
Ask the congregation questions during the sermon	47.50%	19
Invite the congregation to ask questions during the sermon	7.50%	3
Invite the congregation to contribute examples or illustrations to the sermon	20.00%	8
Invite the congregation to summarize previous sermons	2.50%	1
Invite the congregation to share questions or personal examples with neighbors during the sermon	7.50%	3
Post sermon summaries on the website/blog/church-wide email after the sermon	17.50%	7
Other (please specify)	22.50%	9
Total Respondents: 40		

"Other" Responses to Question #8

repeat the words of Scripture in the sermon at emotionally charged moments

3/29/2022 2:02 PM View respondent's answers

Artistic images, complementary litugies and hymns, sermon discussion groups later in the week

3/24/2022 1:29 PM View respondent's answers

Preach expositionally and review past sermons as I preach through the story

3/22/2022 11:12 PM View respondent's answers

Most often we have people form small groups and read the scripture together. It's loud but wonderful

3/15/2022 1:11 PM View respondent's answers

"Beyond Sunday" podcast designed to add additional applicational elements

3/14/2022 1:17 PM View respondent's answers

Reinforce Biblical knowledge from sermons through weekly Bible study groups

3/10/2022 4:35 PM View respondent's answers

Begin sermons (intro) with reviews.

3/10/2022 3:05 PM View respondent's answers

Encourage them to read the scripture before the sermon (during the week at home)

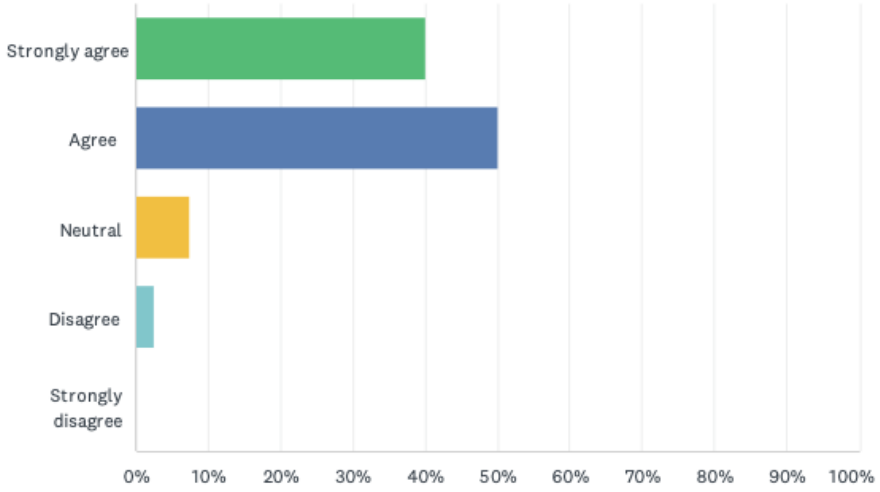
3/10/2022 1:36 PM View respondent's answers

reiterate salient points

3/10/2022 1:08 PM View respondent's answers

Q9 I would like to learn new strategies to help my congregation (or a congregation where I preach) retain Biblical knowledge after the sermon.

Answered: 40 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly agree	40.00%	16
Agree	50.00%	20
Neutral	7.50%	3
Disagree	2.50%	1
Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
TOTAL		40

Q10 Is there any additional information you would like to share about your experiences or strategies for congregational engagement and retention?

Answered: 25 Skipped: 16

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	No	4/5/2022 1:46 PM
2	no	3/29/2022 2:03 PM
3	Involving your members in a sermon prep and sermon review process can be an important tool.	3/24/2022 1:34 PM
4	No additional information but I applaud your research in this area!	3/24/2022 1:31 PM
5	From time to time I do a brief lectio divina, reading a scripture text a few times with a reflection question after each reading, giving the congregation space to offer their thoughts.	3/24/2022 11:56 AM
6	Not that I can think of.	3/22/2022 11:12 PM
7	We don't do the same thing every week which I think is valuable. Our congregation is small enough to engage in participatory learning which I believe helps both engagement and retention. We also set aside a Sunday each month for personal testimony which is the sermon for the day. People love this are engaged and retain these stories of the community.	3/15/2022 1:14 PM
8	Keep each minute focused on how God is speaking to them about their faith-journey and also try to create concise worship responses ("We worship this morning by_____").	3/14/2022 1:19 PM
9	Share to them songs/hymns that reminds me of the truth from Scripture	3/13/2022 1:11 AM
10	Not at this time	3/12/2022 10:36 AM
11	No	3/11/2022 9:37 PM
12	I think modern listeners need to process sermons verbally and with others to retain information, but we've found that New Englanders don't prefer that with strangers or on the spot. So we do sermon-based small group processing during the week. We also use the Discipleship Cycle as often as possible (https://nso.intervarsity.org/library/following-jesus-using-discipleship-cycle)	3/11/2022 4:10 PM
13	Using the employment positions, hobbies, sport preferences of congregants - I use illustrations and stories that apply to their likes.	3/11/2022 4:10 PM
14	What's important to me is not simply retention of what was said but application of the message into everyday living. Not just do they remember a sermon on forgiveness, but have they made steps toward forgiving someone; not just have they understood more the depths of God's love but how has that shaped the way they see themselves and others. Other things I try to do for retention, though not as much as I would like include: brief summaries of previous weeks (particularly when doing a series or a study in a particular book) and quotes or excerpts on social media. The latter I would like to do more but as a solo pastor I am limited in time and not able to do all of those things.	3/11/2022 2:50 PM
15	Probably half of our worship services over the past two years have been recorded, without "people in the pews." It's been hard knowing if we {my wife and I are co-pastors} connected through the sermon. And even in person, it was mostly "get in-get out"!	3/11/2022 2:12 PM
16	I've found it helpful to be aware of my language and tone when preaching--using a conversational tone and providing definitions for unfamiliar words or phrases helps my congregation listen better and understand more.	3/11/2022 1:02 PM
17	What we are doing right now isn't working to it's fullest potential but it seems like people are comfortable with it & it has enough benefits to have people not feel the need to innovate.	3/11/2022 12:54 PM
18	A lot of it depends on knowing my congregation well and how they learn, what they struggle with, etc.	3/11/2022 12:21 AM

19	Personally, I am most concerned with the way faithful preaching forms the hearers over time whether or not they can remember or even recall the specific content of each sermon.	3/10/2022 4:59 PM
20	When appropriate and time permits, I reach back and unpack an event from church history (e.g., contra heresy) to help the congregation appreciate the doctrinal significance of a passage in the life of the believer.	3/10/2022 4:41 PM
21	None	3/10/2022 3:50 PM
22	not at this time	3/10/2022 1:37 PM
23	One of the most important tools is the preacher who believes what they are preaching and is honest about something in the text during the sermon that they are still wrestling to understand.	3/10/2022 1:09 PM
24	I don't have.	3/9/2022 4:20 PM
25	I also use formal liturgical responses to promote engagement and retention, eg corporate confession of sin, song selection, prayers of intercession, framing the Lord Supper, congregational calls to worship, blessings / benedictions, dismissal - can be used to help people engage in the sermons theams and help with retention	3/9/2022 4:15 PM

APPENDIX B

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW RESPONSES

Part A: Sermons in General

1. Why do you attend church services?

- **Respondent 1: Female, Graduate Student**
  I mean, for me in general, Sunday, I feel like I should be in church and listen to refresh my mind and like…but more specific to St. Timothy's, I like the community. And I feel like it helps me get closer to God.

- **Respondent 2: Male, Undergraduate Student**
  I attend church, because I feel like that's what keeps me grounded in Christ. I just like it's like a refresher. You know, I feel like because of church, I could go on throughout the week, like, it's, it's sort of funny, because like, Sunday, to me is in a sort of a weird place. It's like, the end of the week, but also like the beginning of the week. So it's like, it's a great way to end my week. If I have like a stressful or chaotic week. It's like, alright, I can go to church and wind down. Or it's like, oh, I have a crazy week ahead of me, let me go to church. So I could, you know, pray about it, and listen to what you hear and learn and stuff. And I think also everything that comes with church, like great pastors and families, and just a congregation, I think is very important to have that. Those people, you know what I mean?

- **Respondent 3: Female, Graduate Student**
  Oh, I would say in general, for me, it is an opportunity to try to encounter God in a really concentrated environment. So, you know, some, some are more effective than others. But regardless, if I go, then I'm there for, you know, say an hour and a half, where I know I'm spending that solid hour and a half focusing on basically God. And like I said, like, in some cases, that maybe doesn't work as well as others where, you know, if I don't connect well with the sermon, I maybe feel more hostile, but at least I'm still trying to work out stuff with God in that context.

- **Respondent 4: Female, Undergraduate Student**
  Yeah, so I think it really helps to heighten my relationship with God, I think it can be so helpful to enter a place where you just feel closer to God physically, and just surrounded by people with kind of the same ideation and in a similar position as you. And it also just kind of acts as a reset for my week as well.

- **Respondent 5: Female, Undergraduate Student**
  I think, well, one, just how I was raised, you know, like, for me, it's like, it was kind of routine that we go to church every Sunday, so I never really like questioned it. But

it's like now on my own, like, I really look forward to going to church because I'm like, Okay, now I know, like, I'm going to gain something out of this, you know, this is going to be something that I can base my week off of, you know, it kind of just gives me a chance to, you know, think about one, what God has been doing for me in my life into and two, like, how relevant, you know, the Bible is today, and you know, just like how much I can use that to base my life.

- **Respondent 6: Male, Graduate Student**
  I would definitely say I'm needing, I feel like I need to go to worship. Also, just to be with the Christians and kind of rejoicing with other Christians. And, yeah, another thing is also so that I can continue learning. It's just one of the ways I can learn and just progress, you know, with my walk with God. I would say those are pretty much the worship is the main one. But yeah, that's pretty much my reason.

- **Respondent 7: Male, Undergraduate Student**
  It changed over the years, but now it's like, just it's really like, well, the message itself, I want like them to like, talk about the Bible, and make sure like, they talk about like the Bible, not too much external stuff, but like, also the presentation of it. Like, it's different when they're just like, monotone and talking, and they're very, very slow like that, that makes me like, it's like a lullaby almost. But, like, when their presentations like, you know, they're energetic, they're they, they make it very practical. They make it very relatable. They use the Bible and try to like, show how it's still applicable in today's modern world and stuff like that, that makes you want to go to church because I'm like, Oh, wow, this is like, literally the book of life. Like this is like, I can use this today. It's not like a book where I just, like, learn about what they did back in, I don't know, whatever, AD or BC whatever. But it's like I could learn something that could like completely change the way I live my life. So definitely, if they're, like speaking about the things in the Bible, and then breaking it down, and so that I could understand, but also like giving…presenting it in a way where I could, like, make it applicable in my life. And well, easily applicable in my life, because they could present stuff in my life and I'm just like, I don't know what to do with this, like, what am I gonna do with this, like rock or whatever. But if they like to teach me like how to like, use it. And just like, this is the way you can. And there may be other ways that you can use it as well but this is a way you can use. I'm just like, oh, this is like very interesting.

- **Respondent 8: Male, Professional**
  Because I realize I'm nothing if I don't. I've I always realize that I feel like I am an itinerant traveling through the desert. And, and just given the pressure and the environment of the climbs, I'm searching for water, I'm searching for living water. You know, oftentimes I hear that phrase that, you know, you know, God is living water, right. And for me, it, it's often been sort of utilized or employed as a form of salvific motif, right, that he's salvation, he's eternal life. And it never sort of resonated with me that way. That's not to say it's not true, it's true. But that phrase never resonated with me that way. How it resonated with me is the fact that I feel

like life itself is a Living Desert. And, and God, Jesus is my water, and without that I cannot survive. And so it's not just a question of bare necessity that I need God to get through. In the same way one puts a quarter in a slot machine, and you know, you need it for it to work. But also, the Lord has shown me that not only am I quite literally, the very foundation of your life, but as you rely on me, you get to see me much more than that, much more than simply being the cup that you need in order to intake the water, much more than simply be the water in the cup that you drink. But you get to see me as much more than sustenance, even though sustenance is such a core part of any Christians faith, right that you need Jesus, you need as the old folks say, you need the Lord every single day to get through the day. You know, my grandmas would always tell me, they would get up, they don't miss a prayer every morning. And every night. They're like, I have lived this long, because I, every time I go to bed, I pray. First thing I do in the morning is get up. And I look at them and sometimes I remember to do that. And sometimes I don't. And usually, if there's like a storm coming, I will remember, you know. You know how it is. You know, you feel like let me use this when we need them. And for them it's a constant life habit. And for me, even though that's my circumstances… God has created my circumstances such that I have no choice but to go to him. He has revealed himself beyond the necessity of my circumstances. And he has shown me not only am I so fundamental to your very existence, but this is what I can give to you even beyond sort of the very material needs that you. And so I go to church, because it's oxygen, I need it, I need it for sustenance, but I need it because I want to learn and want to learn about where I fit in in His will and I want to learn who I am. And I can only do that by knowing who he is because…I have been…Who I am and who I've told myself I am, I've been wrong about that. Other people said that I am, I've been wrong about that. Who Society says I am, I've been….so the only clear version of getting to who I am is finding out who he is and so that's why I go to church.

[…] So the Lord is like, I will give you everything that you need when you see me and how I see him is being in church, because that's what his command is

- **<u>Respondent 9: Female, Graduate Student</u>**
  Um, for me, the main thing about Sunday services is the word. So I want to hear what it's like, I want to be…I want to come to be fed.

- **<u>Respondent 10: Male, Professional</u>**
  Based on my experience, the most…the preachers that I found the most engaging, and the ones that I look forward to hearing the most are the ones that sound most casual, like you're just having a normal conversation. You're not hearing a lecture from a doctor, from a PhD. Because there's room for that. But you know, every Sunday, you just want to have like a…sort of like, like a conversation, like a daily conversation. Humor is, I think, a very, very powerful tool to build rapport. And yeah, so the short answer, like the people sound…the preachers that sound like they're just having a conversation with you, and not like a peer reviewed PhD defense.

- **Respondent 11: Male, Graduate Student**
  Yeah, so I mean, growing up, I think a large part of that is because others are doing it, you know, my family is all Christian, my immediate family. And then, as I got older it's more like you know, this is the right thing to do. And then you can learn more of the creator, you know, the Bible. Just all about that. I think now, it's also transitioning into like, a sense of community. And making it more my own, figuring out what I actually believe. It's a good break for the week.

- **Respondent 12: Female, Graduate Student**
  Because the Spirit of God is there. Like, I think for me, like a lot of times, we'll go to these like big churches, and I mean, you can do a lot without the Holy Spirit. At the end of the day like, to me, I think if the Holy Spirit leads me I keep coming. Especially when I when I feel like I can, I can encounter like, the authenticity, like, of Jesus, like the authentic real Jesus through people. And so just the, the genuine nature of people. And I think that when they really extend themselves as the hands and feet of God, like, and I can feel that, and I can receive it, that's well, what gets me coming back

- **Respondent 13: Female, Graduate Student**
  I feel like, it's kinda like my origin of Christianity. That's basically where I was personally introduced to God. And I did it, forced to do it. But eventually, that becomes a part of the persona and the relationship that's there with God. At the same time, I have felt like, it's kind of like an anchor. It's in the, in the busy times, like when you have school going on and work and you get so wound up in all of these things. And but that, but when it comes to like, say, Sunday, and you remember that, okay, today is where you remember that, okay, I have other important things. So as much as if I am not thinking about that a lot within the week, when it comes to Sunday, even if I don't go to church, there's always my brain is always… So it kind of brings you to a place where it, it's a foundation, so you can go as far away in your busy schedule, your thoughts, but it always comes back. And it's kind of like a reset. A start over a point for each and every week. So…

- **Respondent 14: Male, Graduate Student**
  I mean, it started when I was younger, and it was more encouraged by my mom. And so our family went. And that was the case through high school. And then when I went away to school, it was a community that at that point, I had felt established with and valued. And through this point, a church community is important because I don't think you can do faith alone. And especially at this point in my life, going through undergrad now, in graduate school, it's very easy to slip away. And so being a part of a group of people that are at a similar point, either in their lives in their faith journey, or just are looking in the word and looking for community and conversations. I think it's a good place for me to do that.

- **<u>Respondent 15: Male, Professional</u>**
  I attend services because that's what I've always done. You meet with God's people. Even if I don't particularly like the service I still go. It's a discipline.

2. How important are sermons to you as part of the church service?

- **Respondent 1: Female, Graduate Student**
  Well, okay, so that question will make me feel am I comparing with watching sermon online? Or like, whether or not comparing me going to church for the sake of community or versus for, for the sermon itself? I don't actually know. I think it's just equal. For me, it's an equal part of the Sunday service like sermon, singing song because that's also the way that I experienced God. And also communions and blessing. Things like that. So I guess, to that extent, it's sort of like, neutral or, yeah. Although I do have to say if there are some bad sermon like constant cause consistently, every time or most of the time that will pull me like the site, maybe I don't want to go there like

- **Respondent 2: Male, Undergraduate Student**
  Um, I think sermons are probably one of the most important to me. I mean, I think like, you know, like you said, the community and the worship is a big part of it. But I think the sermons are probably number one, just because it's like, that is sort of the reason why you're there. It's like, what, again, you know, I know every church kind of goes about it in a different way. But I think that's like, where you're really getting like that's juiciest part of a church is that's where you're getting your information. And that's where you're going to learn and learn from. So,

- **Respondent 3: Female, Graduate Student**
  it's very important to me, I think, that is generally the place where I'm forced to dig into the text. And so generally, what I find is, if it's a sermon that is really just very theoretical, I don't find it all that particularly helpful, the ones that I find more helpful are the ones that are like, here's the text, we're gonna go through it, you know, step by step, like digging into the text, but also thinking about how this than applies to our life. When that happens, it's extremely important because it causes me to reflect on my own life in my own journey.

- **Respondent 4: Female, Undergraduate Student**
  It's highly important, I think that's kind of the driving factor behind the whole service is kind of the backbone. And it provides me with directionality. And just kind of gives me the narrative for my week. And it helps me give…it gives me insight into kind of the narrative behind the biblical passages.

- **Respondent 5: Female, Undergraduate Student**
  Yeah, I mean, I think it's really important for me, just, but at the same time, I'm kind of like, weary. Because, like, how I grew up, like my church, I was, well, I am Catholic. So like, the Catholic Church is very structured. So we sit down, and it wasn't always a relatable sermon, so it's like, okay, like, you're gonna talk some nonsense, and I'm just gonna, like, be here and not get much from you, which I'm like, okay, that sucks. But it's like, I love sermons. Because when they're like, good, they're like good, than I'm like, Oh, my gosh, that just hit every spot I needed. I'm good for like the rest of

the week, the rest of the month. Like that was it. That was a good one. I love sermons as long as they're...but it also depends on like, who's telling it too, because mostly in the Catholic Church, it's an older white man who really doesn't, you know…I don't know. I mean, not that he's not preaching, but most of the time, it's like, I guess mediocre, nothing like crazy. But yeah, I do love a good sermon.

- **Respondent 6: Male, Graduate Student**
  Yeah, I would say, if it's not the first thing that's most important it is the second. I would say the whole experience in general is like, the main reason why I'm there, but I would say, if we're talking about the main parts of church, which part is most important, I'd honestly say the sermon is probably the most important part for me. Personally, I would just say, it helps me, it keeps me accountable. Like, because oftentimes, although we want to hear like, you know, God has grace, He has all these great things for us. You know, we also want to be challenged in some way. I think the sermon is what does that for me. In past churches, as well as St. Timothy's. So I think the sermon is probably the most important part for me of church.

- **Respondent 7: Male, Undergraduate Student**
  I definitely think it's the most important thing, but like, I used to think like, it was the only thing that would…that matters. Like, put it at that high pedestal. Yeah. Like, inevitably, I still do go to church to, like, hear the sermon, but like, now, I'm, like, more focused on like, you know, the fellowship at church or, you know, worship, or all the other stuff that is incorporated into a church service, like even at my church, they have like, like dances and stuff like that, that are incorporated into the church service. So or like, testimonies of like, a certain part where they like, speak up, like just share their testimonies. So like, stuff like that. Those are like extremely important. But yeah, just like, I guess slightly above them as the word because kind of like, puts everything else into place. If it's like said properly.

- **Respondent 8: Male, Professional**
  50, that's half of it. Yeah, half of it. Yeah, I go to church for two main reasons, even though there's much more than that, of course. But one I love the praise and worship, I just, there's something divine, and I don't use this as a turn of phrase, I use it in every sense of it. There's something divine about worshiping with people that you love, and people who love you. And that's something that I've come to experience not knowing that that is an experience to be had, not knowing that that experience will sort of unspool all of these layers of value. It's not something you think, you know, like, oh, I have to get into a college because I need a car, you know, you think about the steps ahead of you, you know, because you're like, I need this for that. When I go, I didn't even know I needed that, or that it is something that I would find valuable. But there's something when I'm at St. Timothy's, for example. And I'm in church. And I see you raise your hand and I see, you know, Vince raise his hand, and I see Taylor, and I see Arpita, and I just see the people who have loved me so well and who I love so much. And we are both praising the God that we love. There's nothing more that feels complete and whole. And at the very core of the epitome of

what true love looks like when it flows through Christ. And so for me, for me, that's what praise does in connecting with other people. I'm like, this is how you show your love. Like there is a love that we're singing not only to God, but to each other. And, and that's something I didn't know, I couldn't preemptively think would be a thing to be had until I'm actually in it. And it becomes revealed to me, right, sort of as this epiphany.

But the other reason why I love worship is because there's an intimacy with Christ, where I feel like it's just him and me. And there's no one else in the world. And he sees me in a deep sense of naked humility, and vulnerability, and I don't have to hide my blemishes, I can just come before him. And he…I remember praying, and I remember saying […] and I was telling the Lord, since I feel like in so much of my life, I'm justifying my own existence, justify myself in all of these different ways, why I deserve to live, why I deserve to be who I am, all of these things. And I said, Lord, when I come to you, I don't have to justify myself. You justify me before I couldn't even open my mouth. And so that burden, […] because there's something burdensome about justifying your existence. And so he takes that away, and he gives justification to my existence, I don't have to do any work. And so that is something that I find meaningful. And that's what I get in sort of praise and worship. So that's why that part is so critical for me, because of what it does for the people. It just continues to plow the ground of love that I have for these people. But it also continues to plow the ground of love that I have for the Lord and the Lord has for me.

When it comes to a sermon. That's where I get to hear the Lord speak through other people. One of the things that I love is when God blesses people prophetically, because I, there's something about hearing from God directly, that I deeply cherish that gift, you know, and so when I see it in other people, it sort of fills me with awe and I'm like the Lord is speaking to them. And then he's not just speaking to them through me, but he's speaking to them through the entire room, and we're all getting different messages that apply to us. And there's something so beautiful about that process that happens between a pastor and Jesus, and then how I'm implicated in that pastoral relationship. And so I go because I want to hear from God am I hear from God when you're at the pulpit. And that's another way the Lord clearly tells me speaks to me. And I love hearing from the Lord and so I go because I need to hear what the Lord has to say to me.

- **Respondent 9: Female, Graduate Student**
  Sermons? For me? I think that's number one. And number two is worship.

- **Respondent 10: Male, Professional**
  Okay. To me…I'm laughing because I already know Mariel probably has a different answer to it. To me, the sermon is probably the most important because I'm a I'm a, I'm a Knowledge Seeker. So when I, when I do worship, I do want to learn the most. But you know, just a quick comment, I…the worship part, never fails to hit me

emotionally. So I don't always come there looking forward to it. Sometimes I even like kind of dread it, cause I'm like I don't feel like singing it today. But when when they start, it's like ah, it's it's it's…there's something there. There's definitely something divine in music. But to me, the sermon is definitely probably up there. Followed closely by the worship and then some fellowship, you know, some friendly faces.

- **Respondent 11: Male, Graduate Student**
  I would probably rank it as number one. I feel like that's the main reason you're there. Yeah, it's more, you know, teaching of God and getting closer to the truth. You know, the other parts are nice, but it doesn't I feel adds quite as much to or like, it doesn't deepen as much. I don't know. But yeah.

- **Respondent 12: Female, Graduate Student**
  Hmm, I think if I were to rank it, like, I think worship is honestly…Okay, so like, I think service…let me let me backtrack. Worship, I think is, like, more important than the sermon. To be honest. I think worship is more important, because I think you have to prepare people's hearts. And I also feel like it's, it's just because I think I'm a fan of just always allowing room or like, margin for the spirit to move and lead. And so like, even if you've planned something, I think I can, I can trust if you're being led by the Spirit, and I can trust like that. Um, and so. So yeah, I think worship first than like, sermon second.

- **Respondent 13: Female, Graduate Student**
  Um, I think for most part, it's been, as much as it's been, like, just teaching and God speaking to you, in different ways. It kinda like gives a different perspective on how other people have the relationship with God, or how God is communicating through other people or to me, so it's kinda like, an intermediary. That kind of, like, sheds light in spaces that maybe I'm not able to get on my own. And also, kind of like, sometimes it's kinda like, okay, that message is like, for me, I know what I'm doing. So I think it's, it's a way to learn more, because I don't think the word of God is just one message, it applies differently to different situations. So I think it also helps with like you relating with other people, knowing that other people in different situations, the word will resonate differently, as well. So yeah, it's more of perspective, like it provides an opportunity to see the word from different eyes.

- **Respondent 14: Male, Graduate Student**
  I would say so, I've always been someone that really is drawn to the worship, at some of the service… at some of the churches I've been to in the past, but now I think a lot of sermons are important in the way that they can relate to my life and my life that has kind of developed more as I've gotten older and see more. And so they've become more important, of like what is the message I can take away from this or having sermons that can go a little bit more in depth of what is this mean, and my spiritual journey of what I can take from this away from Sunday out into the

community when I interact with others and the way I perceive the world? So I'd say it's pretty important as it's just a good way to kind of like guide the way I live.

- **Respondent 15: Male, Professional**
  It depends how good they are. I don't like sermons where the pastor simply talks about themselves or pretends they are a stand-up comedian. I prefer sermons that engage with scripture and encourage me to do the same.

3. How do sermons affect your relationship with God?

- **Respondent 2: Male, Undergraduate Student**
  Um, I think they do. Because because of the sermons, I get to know him better. So I think they do affect a lot of my relationship with God. And like I said, I mean, that's, like, in my opinion, where you learn from, so um, I think, yeah, I think they're, they affect a lot.

- **Respondent 3: Female, Graduate Student**
  I think it depends. So in some cases, where…my pet peeve is usually when the minister is talking at you, rather than with you. So it's like "you do this and you do this," like "you are capable of this sin and did it" and I'm like, "can we all just reflect together?" And so in that case, it usually sours how I feel about religion, which is not helpful to my relationship with God. But…so a minister even if their sermon is not particularly great, if I find them to be well intentioned, and say emotionally generous in the sense that they're not judging they're trying to help, even a bad sermon, and I can find something from it. But when you hear, you know, a really good sermon that both you know, connects to your life and does so in a way that doesn't feel preachy, but more like "let's all grow together," I find that to be incredibly instrumental to my relationship with God, like a lot of times sermons had been kind of the springboard for movement in my spiritual journey.

- **Respondent 4: Female, Undergraduate Student**
  Oh, no, they're very useful. They helped me to understand God better. They kind of act to me, they act as a bridge between me and God, and kind of give me that ability to communicate more effectively. Yeah.

- **Respondent 5: Female, Undergraduate Student**
  I mean, I think a good sermon, you know, it really just brings me closer, and I think that's what they're meant to do. You know, that's, like, the whole purpose of it. But you know, it definitely does bring me closer to God and it makes me more like, eager to, you know, fulfill his will and do what he wants, you know, and kind of just follow him. That's what I found a lot of sermons recently have, like, made me do it's kind of just like, Okay, you said this now, how can I be somebody that you know, you trust or that somebody that can constantly just follow, you know, even though it's difficult, very difficult, but yeah, I think a good sermon will definitely help. I mean, it always sticks in like the back of your head, like not just throughout the week, but just like, really, throughout the rest of my life, like it really just like, there'll be that little voice that's like, "Umm, remember that point?" It's like, "Yeah, unfortunately, so let me take a step back."

- **Respondent 6: Male, Graduate Student**

Yeah, I think it affects my relationship with God. Firstly, like I said, it places that kind of…it firstly challenges me and keeps me accountable and a lot of the time because they really got where I feel like going through the sermon is able to kind of give me in a thoughts about ways I can become closer to God. And also better Perhaps things that I could improve in my life. Perhaps there's some sin that I haven't thought about. And yeah, mostly just keep keeping me accountable so that I can continue like pursuing God to just improve, like, as a person. Be more like Jesus.

- **Respondent 7: Male, Undergraduate Student**
  It…I know there's a verse that says, you know…I forgot. But basically, we can't hear without like a preacher. Right? So like, the way it affects my like, I guess relationship with God just kind of like, almost gives God a voice when I don't know how to, like, give God…or understand God's words in my own life. Like if somebody just like, came by my door and just says, speak to God and drops the Bible at my door. I'm gonna be like, I've no idea what to do with this. Like read it? This is a very thick book and has like, I don't know, all these words, I may not understand like sanctification and regenerate. I'm like, what, what does this have to do? Like, I never use these words in my life. I don't think I'll ever used them outside of church. But yeah, like, when I hear the words, they're just like breaking it down and just be like, okay, like, this is what, this is a way you can read the Bible, or this is what God is saying, or this is this, this could be related to this or something like that. It kind of like, makes me understand like through that person, and I can obviously confirm that through myself or through my actual reading, like, what is God actually saying? And was God speaking to me? And also like, you know, when when people speak like, you know, there's like some sermons are like very condemning. There's some sermons are very uplifting and stuff like that. So like, the sermons like, convict me or not convict….convince me to either do more of a thing or do less of a thing. Depending on like, the way I'm living my life, let's say like, I have like a bad I don't know, cursing problem, just random. Like, depending on the sermon it could encourage me to, to either…t will encourage me actually to, like, do that cursing less, depending on like, how I feel about this based on the presentation, but yeah, so overall, sermons kind of, like encourage me to like…It like gives God a voice in my life. It's a way that God could speak and speak to me in my life. And I'm able to understand them and then obey.

- **Respondent 9: Female, Graduate Student**
  Um, so listening to sermons? Especially, I don't know, it depends on the sermon too. It makes me like, think about I mean, when I listen to it, typically, I chew on the information that I got, like few hours later the next day, so when I started to, like, slow down at the end of the day, sometimes those the words that I heard from Sunday starts to like, get in and it really helps me.

- **Respondent 10: Male, Professional**
  Good question. So, how do they affect my…you said my relationship with God? If I had to choose a word, I would say it deepens it. Right? Getting to know a person,

getting to know…getting to know your father through what people write about him. And how the experts in those writings talk about him and his works. So yeah, I would say it deepens my relationship with God. And, and sort of renews it revitalizes. You know, again, it's I don't always come to worship, come to church enthusiastically. Thankfully, I have someone who faithfully drags me. Dragging is a bad word. But when I get, when I get there, there's this renewal, right? Just renewal of my relationship with God. So yeah.

- **Respondent 11: Male, Graduate Student**
  It's a large part of, you know what I know about God. And it definitely shapes the relationship and how I approach him. So it's, you know, over time, it's probably one of the biggest factors

- **Respondent 12: Female, Graduate Student**
  Sermons affect it by getting me to actually read God's word. So like, I think with some sermons, if it feels like a sort of, I mean, people say, like, prosperity gospel, or if it feels like some sort of catchy thing, but like, you're never referencing like the word. I just think it was a motivational speech. But like, if it's like something where it's like, according to Scripture, if you look back in Scripture, and you, you know, reread this, and also like, when they actually encourage us to read it ourselves, like, so it's not like, Oh, you must listen to what I'm saying and believe what I'm saying, because I'm sitting here and saying it. But this is what the Lord has revealed to me as I was looking through the Scripture, and I encourage you to look at it too. And so like that sort of style, and continuing to just…referring back to the referring back to…that gets me excited about, okay, like, what does Jesus say like, what, what is God saying, like, so…

- **Respondent 13: Female, Graduate Student**
  Yeah, I would say like the Insight The inside is the main is the main part. And a lot more, a lot more times God has spoken to me through random preachers. And I've seen perspective, perspectives that I never thought about. And it might or might not help in the current situation that I'm going through. Or I might be able to ascertain a situation when I get to that part. So yeah.

- **Respondent 14: Male, Graduate Student**
  I'd say, connecting with God through prayer. Just sometimes whether it be a quote, whether it be a passage, or just the overall message of, of the sermon is…wants me to take a step back, and, and reflect and I feel like a good way of at the end of the service and communion or later that day just connecting with God through prayer. Yeah.

  [Sermons deepen a relational connection with God.] What I like about sermons is, which I guess actually is kind of similar to lectures is you're getting something, you're getting a message that maybe you can't get on your own. It's explained, it's drawn upon more so than I might think when I read a passage, and that's what

allows me to just connect a little bit further with God is, I may not see this without the guidance that's the person in front of me talking.

4. Other than sermons, how do you learn about God?

- **Respondent 1: Female, Graduate Student**
  Yeah, how I learn about God. I think I pray and experience through my life and then ideally read Bible but honestly haven't been reading bible as consistent as I would hope. Yeah.

- **Respondent 2: Male, Undergraduate Student**
  Personally, my mom, like outside of church, my definitely my mom, and then just, of course, the Bible. Yeah, I like I know, it's sort of silly, but also social media too. Like I, I'm more of like a person that kind of likes to listen, as opposed to, like, I know, reading your Bible is like, the most important thing you could do, which I need to do more often than I than I do. But I like listening. Like, even when I'm like, I really got to start reading my Bible more. I tend to like think, well, what if I could, like, open my Bible, but have like an audio book going to so like, I could hear it and follow along. But I think like, mostly my mom, just learning from my mom and social media, like I love those like, snippets of just preachers on social media. Because it gives me just that reminder throughout the day, you know, as I'm, you know, just on whatever social media platform, it's like, I get that and it's like, Yes, I need to get off of this app and go study my Bible or pray or just so yeah, I would say those little things because sometimes like, I mean, I sort of get a little like overwhelmed easily so sometimes it's like, when a lot of information is thrown out at me, I kind of like I'm like, like drowning in it. So I kind of appreciate like those little bits of information, so I could let it sink in and digest opposed to having like this big whole sermon just thrown at me and like, you know, 45 minutes or two an hour or however long Yeah, services normally are. But I mostly think of course, the Bible, that's probably the most.

- **Respondent 3: Female, Graduate Student**
  I read a lot of books. I mean, I'm sure this shocks you deeply. I'm an academic who's like "so what can't I learn from a book?" My biggest thing like, you went, you know, I went to Christian School and like knowing theologically what is in the Bible is usually not my issue. It's, you know, the emotional connection. So at this point, for me, learning about God is not necessarily learning theology. It's learning about him experientially and emotionally. So I generally find outside of sermons that takes place like every night. The last thing I do before I go to sleep is I, you know, either read from the Bible, I read one of my books, you know, on a topic from like I'm reading one about prayer right now. And I'll spend a little bit of time reflecting on that. And it's usually about like, 20 minutes to a half hour. And that's generally where I find that I grow outside of like the church setting.

- **Respondent 4: Female, Undergraduate Student**
  Yeah, so especially St. Timothy's, I do think I like, go back to the sermons that we talked about during the week, as kind of my way to, you know, speak with God or kind of direct myself when learning. But I also use apps like Dwell. Yeah. And I, they

give you like, a passage every day. And so that definitely is a big resource as well. Certainly, podcasts, things like that. Um, so yeah, definitely.

- **Respondent 5: Female, Undergraduate Student**
  Um, I mean, life experience really, but also like, recently, I've been starting to read the Bible a lot more. And that has been a good thing for me just because I'm able to, you know, relate it to my own life and use it for future circumstances and just use it for my morality, you know, based on what I do. Every day off of that, so definitely Bible reading, but also life experiences, you know, kind of just after, like I was saying yesterday, kind of just like taking a step back and seeing like, from a third person point of view, like, hey, this has been happening. These are the patterns, you know, this is God speaking to you. And then it's like, Oh, okay, I get it.

- **Respondent 6: Male, Graduate Student**
  So mostly through reading the Bible, honestly. And yeah, although I'm not, you know, the most disciplined doing that, you know, I would say I read around four times, five times per week. But um, yeah, definitely. For me, the main thing is reading the Bible. Another thing is, during the semester, I did have like a Bible study on Wednesdays. And, yeah, through that I'm able to, like, talk about with others about what passages could mean. And we also do that in churches as well. In the service. Yeah. So aside from the sermon, I'd say reading the Bible, and then basically, any kind of Bible study with others, whether that's within the church like discussing answers, or like kind of a group, a separate group Bible study.

- **Respondent 7: Male, Undergraduate Student**
  Other than sermons? I mean, I don't even know if they're called sermons, but like podcasts. Through like, one on one conversations, or small group conversations. Through random, like videos that are somewhat have something to do with God like, I don't know, movies, or like TV shows, like, I remember. Like, there's a movie called, like, Mary Magdalene, that I really liked. And it was a movie called…And obviously, like, the Chosen and stuff like that, those are like, really…And then other than that, it's just kind of like, through what you hear, like, whether it be like the news or whatever type of like social media or something like that, like, or just randomly I'm talking on the street, and then you just hear, like, people's conversations and stuff like that. Multiple ways I could like intake God and stuff like that. I don't know if there's like a main way other than, like, actual church, it will be like me and my personal time just reading or just watching something.

- **Respondent 8: Male, Professional**
  Yeah. So for me my devotionals are really, really important. That's how I hear from God. You know, I read my…I try to read it every day. I don't…it depends on the season. If I feel very, you know, like, if I need something, I'll ensure I'll go there. But sometimes when I need things, I feel so hopeless, that I don't go, you know, so I mean, the enemy tries to prevent you from communing with God all the time, right. So even in the times that I think I would be drawn to God, sometimes I'm not, you

know, because I feel so defeated. But even in times when good things are happening, and bad things are happening and I go…my devotional, my own private devotional is so crucial to that. Because it allows me to really spend that one-on-one time with the Lord in a way that is very intentional, in a way that is that is very productive and studious, right? Like I can talk to God when I'm in the car. But my, my level of attention is limited. Because you know, all I can do is pray, you know, type of way and you're watching the road and you're doing all these other things, but then when you're sitting down, and you're really consecrating that moment as devotional time, you know, that's another structured moment for me. And the Lord takes all my moments, structured and unstructured one, but outside the church, my devotional is another structured one. Bible study, you know, is also another structured moment. And those are the ways that I engage the text…engage the Bible and engage the Lord through Bible study through my personal devotion.

- **Respondent 9: Female, Graduate Student**
  Yeah. So I listen…I read the Bible, though recently, shamefully, I really only reading like few verses compared to before. And then… but I can, I usually listen to podcasts during my commute. Yeah, I've recently I've been like going more than one hour going to UConn, so that's how.

- **Respondent 10: Male, Professional**
  All of the above. [**Bible studies, conversations, online classes]** I don't know some might say sadly, the most conventional way is the least that I do, which is like actually sit down and read the Bible. Perhaps this year, I'll try really hard to set aside time to just sit down and actually read the scriptures. But I mostly do my, my Bible study through audiobooks. I just I just listen to the audiobook of the Bible. Lately ever since Pastor Vince recommended…pointed me towards Reverend Tom Wright I've just been like, almost almost 95% like Tom Wright. His lectures and his books. I find his scholarly approach very…it's almost like I find a kindred spirit in the way I approach the Bible, which is which, which is, you know, by wrestling it here [motions to head], I'm here [motions to head]. I'm trying to do more here [motions to heart] for the audio my heart, but I'm trying to feel it more but definitely I have to I have to wrestle with it in my in my head and Rev. Wright, Dr. Wright, everybody knows him as NT Wright really does that. So him. There's also John Piper. I like what, I like listening to John Piper. And then lectures, you know, like I told you before the beginning, I started, I started really listening to Yale, Yale University undergrad lectures on the Old Testament, and eventually the New. And you know what, it's funny, it's, it's, they're these channels that just are like, do the study, like the Bible Project. I love it so much. What they do is is is a gift to, to, to our faith to Christianity, just the way they they, you know, sort of translate the themes of the Bible, passages of the Bible, are very short and easy to digest videos that are surprisingly very accurate and well, well studied. And like it's amazing. It's very rare to find something that's this easy, but so effective at the same time. Usually there's there's an exchange, right? The quick video, there's not a lot of deliberation, but they

somehow they managed to pack so much again accurate information. But yeah, so again, all the above.

- **Respondent 11: Male, Graduate Student**
  Yeah. So I mean, there's obviously Bible reading, I've done…I've read through the Bible more than once, and then talk with people, whether that's Bible study, or just like fellowship. But I feel like some stuff bleeds in from just like cultural view towards authority and stuff like that. But yeah, those are some other factors.

- **Respondent 12: Female, Graduate Student**
  So like, I learn about God, usually through… think the biggest…I would just call myself a worshiper, to be honest, like, I really learn a lot about him through worship. I definitely feel the presence of God. And so like, for me, it's like, it's different when people tell you about it, like, you know, when you when you're learning about the news, like when people tell you about it and you read about it, you're like, okay. But like when you've actually encountered it, it's just, I don't…I'm not relying on other people to like, tell me. I've experienced it, and I know it, and I believe it. And like prayer, also, is how I learn about God, too. Because sometimes I'll pray. And then I feel like God is just flushing my my mind with like, some sort of revelation or like, something happens when I just speak the name of Jesus. So just having that sort of audible encounter with him as well as like worship helps me to learn more about him and then he directs me to his word.

- **Respondent 13: Female, Graduate Student**
  Um, conversations with people. That will be a me a big one. And also, just taking time to read the Bible on my own. Yeah, and music. And music.

- **Respondent 14: Male, Graduate Student**
  Through worship on my own and reading, whether it be like reading the Word, or I have some books that have allowed me like different perspectives, so like, there's this one book I read, um, by a geneticist Francis Collins, and he talked about, like, the relationship between faith and science, which was really interesting. And so I think books like that are great for me to kind of get that connection. So those are some ways to kind of strengthen that relationship.

- **Respondent 15: Male, Professional**
  Reading is one big way I learn about God. Life experience and prayer would be the others.

5. How do sermons affect your relationship with the Bible?

- **Respondent 1: Female, Graduate Student**
  With the with the Bible, okay, so I feel like this sermon time is sometimes I got the summary that I that I haven't thought of, or provides me or give me a different perspective than why when I read things like that yeah, what was the other thought I but I forgot. Getting old. Yeah. What was that with the Bible, okay. With the Bible. Okay, to be fair, sometimes, especially this semester, between these hours or this period, I feel like I do not commit that much in doing morning time, like quiet time, as before. So having a sermon or listening to sermon in person or online I definitely helped me remind me or at least gave me some exposure in God's word.

- **Respondent 2: Male, Undergraduate Student**
  Um, well, I think it's like if I hear a sermon, and I really like it, or enjoyed it, and like, feel connected. So I could go back to the Bible, because that's where it came from. You know what I mean? I think it all kind of stems from the Bible. And sermons could just be like, context clues, or like snippets of like, a little bit of a portion of what the Bible is. So it's like, you hear that? It's like, Oh, I really enjoyed that sermon. I want to know more, I want to know, stuff before that. And after, and it's like, then you just go to your Bible. It's like your, it's your guide and key to life.

- **Respondent 3: Female, Graduate Student**
  Again, like, a lot of yeah…probably similar answers where, you know, a good one it can help me experience the Bible in a practical way and understand and get thinking about, like, how does this relate to how I actually live my life? You know, a mediocre one, it can maybe teach me theologically something about the Bible, and you know I don't know everything. So there are often details that like, I wouldn't know that, you know, particularly knowledgeable pastor can explain to me. And I do appreciate that. Like, I don't want it all to just be experiential. I think it does need to be rooted in theology, and like, what the Bible actually says, which is why we always let you and Vince go last because here's the context of that, but then you also still place it and how are we experiencing that in daily life.

- **Respondent 4: Female, Undergraduate Student**
  Yeah, so it gives me the direction I need. Whereas on my own, I think sometimes it can be hard to have that same direction. And it's my understanding of the text itself, because the Bible can be very, like, it can be intimidating, and so have a little piece broken off for me and applied to the context of our lives today. That, you know, that certainly impacts me and helps me, whereas on my own, it would be kind of crazy.

- **Respondent 5: Female, Undergraduate Student**
  Yeah, I think it makes me more interested in wanting to read it. Because sometimes, like, I don't want to, like, go back to that one specific part where it just like, really resonates with me. And then I kind of just like, save that verse. And kind of just like, I just go off of it for like, however long I need. But yeah, I think it just really makes

me more interested in reading the Bible and definitely learning the stories. Like I feel like in my head, it's like, okay, wisdom, knowledge, righteousness, wickedness, and then like, bits of stories, so it kind of just makes me want to know the whole thing. Yeah.

- **Respondent 6: Male, Graduate Student**
  Yeah, I think it's probably like, a similar answer, probably. You know, with the Bible, you know, it's God's word and it's, it's not God, but it's a book. So like, in terms of a physical object, I'd say it's about, is it keeping me disciplined, more disciplined or less disciplined than reading? Or is it giving me more desire to read or less desire to read? And I mean, I would say, it probably, it gives me the accountability, part of the sermon probably gives me more desire to read. Because I know that there's, you know, things I can work on. And so I know, I can access God's Word through reading. And it probably, yeah, in terms of with the Bible, I'd say it probably strengthens my discipline with the Bible or reading. I'm not sure if that's how I should answer the question.

- **Respondent 7: Male, Undergraduate Student**
  It makes me want to, like read…well, depending on the presentation, to like, read the Bible. Because like, if they say something very, like, cutthroat like, I'm just like, I don't know, man, if I want to, like, go through that again. But like, other times, they'll like, encourage me like, Oh, this is something interesting, and sounds like they just scratched the surface while they were like talking. So I want to like, learn more about this. I feel like there's something deeper, but I don't know the full context. Let me go ahead and start to read or watch a video. I know, there's like, videos on YouTube called Bible Project and stuff like that. So like, they break down the Bible really well. So I'm just like, let me try to figure out like, what they're talking about, and maybe like, I get some new revelation that will completely change my life. So like, these sermons like, encourage me to like, read the Bible more, depending on the presentation, if it's a monotone, I'm just like, I dunno what I just learned. I guess I'll just live my life, I guess. But when it's like really good, and really like, well, good to me. I guess that's subjective. I'm just like, wow, I need to learn more about this. You know?

- **Respondent 9: Female, Graduate Student**
  Um, there are a lot of things that I learn through a sermon about the Bible. So whenever like something that is for me, like, oh, that's unfamiliar to me. So that helps me be familiar. Sometimes I bookmark it, and I'll go back to you later or something.

- **Respondent 10: Male, Professional**
  Sermons? It…I think it enriches it. You know…because it's one thing for me to read the passage, right, and try to interpret it myself or like feel what the Spirit is telling me. And it's one thing to hear it from someone who studied it, and has more in depth knowledge of it. So So yeah, I think it enriches, enriches it.

- **Respondent 11: Male, Graduate Student**
  Yeah, so obviously, it influences how you interpret it. You know, over the years, I think I've gotten a solid view in which to do that. So you may have to like, do you agree with the sermon or not, but generally it agrees and widens my beliefs.

- **Respondent 12: Female, Graduate Student**
  Yeah. No, it's a good point. No. Yeah. So I purposely seek out sermons where they constantly tell us to refer to the Bible because like it can be really easy to get caught up on like this feel good speech and feel good thing. I'm I'm not here to feel good, but I'm here to be convicted. I'm here to say like,,,look in a mirror and see like where have I not like, yielded my life to God? And where have I like sort of withheld certain things to where I think like God is inviting me to put that out in the forefront so that we can walk this thing out together. And so, yeah

- **Respondent 13: Female, Graduate Student**
  Um, definitely read more. Because I've learned, like, what I was saying that if you read the Bible, in different situations, it will definitely resonate differently. So as like, you read something like, be joyful, or be grateful for everything and you don't feel so grateful or joyful, it's, it's kinda like, it's not really like forcing you to do that, but kind of like, it's life. It's, it's gonna pass and…yeah, so I don't know what I was saying?

  Yes, yeah. So it's kinda like, it helps you, it helps me understand that i different situations, I can lean on it. Hard times, good times. Going back to it just helps you remember, or helps you feel better, or just reassures you in some way. So yeah.

- **Respondent 14: Male, Graduate Student**
  I think one thing I'm not the best at is remembering direct passages or biblical stories. It's not something I feel that's my strength. But I think what sermons get for me from content of the Bible is an added meaning to it. So it makes me want to go back. And whether it be in the church service, or even in a small group, which I know you're, you're looking at more like the interactive style of sermons, I think that's great. Because you get to have conversations, you get to think of what are the alternative ways I can think about this. But what I also like about that context is when you have like a passage, you don't want to…you may not want to look at that passage in isolation, like, what's around it? What does it say before? What does it say after? And how does that? Bring it all together? So I think that's like a good thing.

- **Respondent 15: Male, Professional**
  A good sermon will invite me to engage personally with God's word myself.

6. Other than sermons, how do you learn about the Bible?

- **Respondent 1: Female, Graduate Student**
  Yeah, this is a bad question for me yeah reading bible…I don't read Bible that often honestly. Unfortunately.

- **Respondent 2: Male, Undergraduate Student**
  Just like, well, I guess, church, like, obviously, just attending church because like, you know, you're hearing stuff that is in the Bible. Like I said, I know, it's a little silly, but like social media, and my mom. Um, but yeah, honestly, personally, I really would just say most of it is my mom. And just, like I said, those little bits of like those little reels on social media, because I just like, because mostly it's like universal things. It's not necessarily like specific, you know, passages or stories, sometimes it is, but I just like how it's like a universal thing. Like, you know, I saw something the other day last night, and I actually screen recorded it and saved it because I was like, I need this daily reminder. Like, I need to see this every day. And it was just something about how, like, stop trying to think you could do everything on your own. Because you can't you need the power of the Holy Spirit, and the strength that they gave you. Like, everything stems from God and the Holy Spirit. You can't do anything yourself like it. It's all because in for them. So I just like, like I said, seeing those like universal things that everybody, maybe even, you know, a non believer could see and be like, okay, yeah, I, I agree with that. So yeah, probably, I would say that.

- **Respondent 5: Female, Undergraduate Student**
  Um, I don't know, I want to say really sermons. I mean, maybe conversation here and there. Definitely conversations with Dylan. But yeah, mostly conversation, but besides that, yeah, it'd be like sermons online. Yeah. Maybe devotionals. But yeah, I don't do those as much as I probably should.

- **Respondent 6: Male, Graduate Student**
  Yeah, I think it's…how do I learn about the Bible. Hmm. I would say, honestly, I also look at apologetics like on YouTube and stuff. And a lot of the time, you know, we're talking about like, can we trust the Bible? Is it what…how can we interpret this verse? What do this denomination think this means? In terms of learning the Bible. And in that way, I'd say, honestly, YouTube channels that talk about apologetics, that's how I learned about the Bible, in terms of like, it's a historical document. And facts about the Bible itself, like the accuracy and stuff like that. Yeah

- **Respondent 7: Male, Undergraduate Student**
  How do I learn about the Bible? Kinda like…oh, well, we'll be like, through family. I think I forgot to bring that up. Like just are like friends and family who already read the Bible and stuff. Through, like I said before, like TV, movies, through news and media, also through something else. Just randomly, like, so many avenues so many informal ways. Like if you somebody could be wearing a shirt. I'm just like, Where'd

you get that from? And I will, like just randomly see, or I see something on a billboard. I'm just like, where you get that from? That's wise. Also like, just like non I guess, spiritual books. I'm just like, Where'd they get this idea from? This is brilliant. Yeah, like, I look in the Bible. I'm just like, oh, it correlates. Nice.

- **Respondent 9: Female, Graduate Student**
  Um, other than sermons, how I learn? I Aside from reading, from reading the Bible, it's the podcast. Yeah.

- **Respondent 10: Male, Professional**
  Yeah, like I said, different media. I'm an audible leader, reader, or learner if if you haven't noticed yet, like a lot of those things that I mentioned before, I usually just play in the background. When I'm driving. I love doing it when I'm driving and I'm sorry, can you see the question one more time?

  Okay, so so that and then I didn't mention it much earlier, but like podcasts, I like to listen to podcasts, like Mariel. There's a podcast that she listens to, which is just two…they're sisters. And they're so good. They actually…one of them studied Hebrew in school so she so she…like certain words that I know that people who did not study Hebrew, she would explain it and it just really puts it puts an extra layer in the scripture that you would never know if you didn't know certain words. That's just so it's so it's so enlightening. Sometimes it makes the passage…it sounds completely different. Or at least like I wouldn't I wouldn't think that that's actually what it was for. Like recently there was a…I'll just make this quick, they were talking about the parable, Jesus's parable of the wedding, right, the the master of the wedding who's like…who sent out their servants. Like the feast is ready, invite everyone. And then for some reason the people didn't want to come. And they not only made fun of the master, they they beat and they killed like the servants. And it turns out it was actually a parable. It's a metaphor for God offering salvation. So everyone, but for somehow for some reason, you know, most people don't accept it. And certain…in certain cases, they even fight it. Right? So yeah, so they were talking about certain parts of the Hebrew culture that are aspects of that they do they…I never knew that the according to them, the podcast, like the vision of the way the Israelites sort of like envision heaven was like this big banquet. And so that parable completely makes sense. So I was like, I never have gotten that.

- **Respondent 11: Male, Graduate Student**
  I mean, primarily from reading it, like a yearly Devo. I've also like done some investigation into like, academic videos or articles on stuff. And then, of course, Bible studies.

- **Respondent 12: Female, Graduate Student**
  Oh, so I learn about the Bible through like, podcast, Audible, like, like, cartoons. Oh my gosh, I love cartoons. To be honest, like, I love watching, like, when I was watching the Prince of Egypt, and I'm watching like, you know, just like different

sort of like cartoons. And I'm just like, oh, this is really cool. Even when I was watching, like, a movie about Esther and like, so I really learned a lot. So. So yeah, I start off with like, some sort of cartoon to like, just learn about it in the most basic way. And then just like, wait, I wonder like, what it really meant. So then I go back to the Bible. I'm like, whoa, like the Bible is even more descriptive and more like amazing. But like, if I was already wowed from a cartoon like, yeah, so I'm just very a fan of visuals.

- **Respondent 13: Female, Graduate Student**
  Um, conversations with people. That will be a me a big one. And also, just taking time to read the Bible on my own. Yeah, and music. And music.

- **Respondent 14: Male, Graduate Student**
  Umm..I think conversations with people, whether it be like fellow believers, or even not just getting an understanding of like, what they think or what they know about the Bible. Talking about it with my mom. I think also, like I've said before, worship songs sometimes like it's an older song, but "whom shall I fear" has, like, has direct passages from the Bible in it. And I think that's what makes me either know where it is, and go back and look at it. So those are the ways that I really think…I'm trying to think of others. I think that's most of it. I don't really use social media for that. Yeah, just like people and music.

- **Respondent 15: Male, Professional**
  I read it. I read secondary literature myself.

7. **How satisfied are you with your understanding of the Bible? How confident are you in engaging with the Bible on your own?**

- **Respondent 2: Male, Undergraduate Student**
  Um, I definitely feel hesitant. I think it's very overwhelming. Like, it's, it's very, you know, it's a big book. And it's like, that is like your guide to life, like, anything you need to know is in that book. So it's like, it's very simple to go there. That's why I'm like, I really on my mom, every day tells me like, I have no excuse to not read my Bible between, just like church, it's there in front of me and the Bible studies, does like, and the daily reminder every day. And I just like, I'm always afraid, like, oh, gosh, like, literally, we don't know when, you know, it'll be our time or like, when the world will end and God will come, you know, Jesus will come back. And it's like, I don't want to stand before God someday. And he'll be like, Why didn't you read your Bible? Like, because you have no excuse? Like, it was? It was there in front of you, like, there? So? Um, I, I definitely, it just I think it intimidates me a little bit. Also, I, I just personally have kind of a little bit of a hard time understanding things when I read them. So that's why I tend to try and get like an audio book or something or just like, you know, somebody who reads like one of the stories of the Bible that I'm I'm trying to study right now. And I'll still follow along in my Bible, because I think that is like the most important part is that, like, the tangible part of it is holding it physically reading it. But I think having that like extra boost of like, being able to understand really helps. Yeah, I hope that answered,

- **Respondent 3: Female, Graduate Student**
  Not particularly. The honest answer that would be like: in what context? I mean, like in terms of, you know, theoretical knowledge of the Bible, like I'm pretty confident, if I don't know it, I can look it up. I can figure it out. I can…but when it comes to, like, actually living it in an emotional sense, and having an emotionally healthy emotional relationship with God: no, no, no, not confident at all. I think that's one of the primary functions of community for me, because, for better or for worse, I'm an academic, I get very into my own head. So like, I can talk myself down a little spiral rabbit hole of anger, where, you know, I get fixated on something that…so it's super helpful to have that community around you that's like, "But what if Jesus loved you?" Like that kind of pull you back out kindly and force you to see things from another perspective. So in that sense, I'm not confident, but I appreciate the community. I'm confident within the context of the community

- **Respondent 4: Female, Undergraduate Student**
  I wish I was more confident for sure. I think I'm definitely working on that. It can be like I just said it can be so confusing to navigate by yourself. And I'm certainly not like overly confident in my understanding. And I'm grateful for church leaders and the sermons I'm provided with each week to kind of give me that direction that I need. I think I grew up going to Sunday school every week. And then after that, like I kind of didn't like have any direction or any other education outside of that. And so it can be a little confusing. And just kind of, I don't think my understanding of the

text was very strong, until I reached out and got the resources I needed. So there's definitely room for growth. But I think St. Timothy's has really helped with that.

- **Respondent 5: Female, Undergraduate Student**
  Yeah, I feel pretty confident reading it, just because I feel like there's something in every single line. So I really enjoy that. But it's like days like today, like I was trying to read it this morning. And I was like, nothing is reaching out to me. So I feel like it really just depends, but most of the time, like, there is something there. There is something to gain, you know, every time I read it. So yeah.

- **Respondent 6: Male, Graduate Student**
  I don't think…in terms of a scale from one to 10, with my confidence, like, honestly, it's not that high. Because a lot of the times when I'm reading, like one of my struggles, i like understanding what the text means, and how I can apply it, and I think that's where I can improve. Instead of just reading and being like, Okay, I'm done being like, kind of reflecting on what it means and how I can apply it to my life. Sometimes my confidence, I say, is maybe like a six out of seven out of 10, six out of 10 with my confidence with just taking a grasp of the Bible and applying it. Room for improvement.

- **Respondent 7: Male, Undergraduate Student**
  Semi confident, because I'm just like, Yes, I get a whole bunch of stuff. Like, I don't know. It's kind of like, how writers have like, writer's block. Sometimes I have like, Bible block. Like, I'm just like, reading the Bible, and I get like, a lot. I'm just like, wow, this is amazing. I look back a couple verses. I'm just like, there's something deeper to this. Yeah. I can't see it. Like it's like, I have blindfolds on, like, then like, a couple verses down. It's just like, oh, wow, this is amazing. I'm just like, yeah, yeah. So I open up the Bible and understand a lot. But here's still like so much more that I'm just like…it's almost like I kind of like got okay with the feeling like, No, I'm gonna understand it eventually in the future, even though I don't understand it in the moment currently. So yeah, Semi.

- **Respondent 9: Female, Graduate Student**
  On my own, I can say maybe 60%. Because I know that I tried to learn techniques on my own before. But then I think I would appreciate a more rich…like I wanted to have a richer or like, cultural wise, I wanted to be in there, understand the words, the translation, something like that. So, yeah, I would say 60% only.

- **Respondent 10: Male, Professional**
  It depends, right, on the passage depends on the book, right? Because obviously, some of the Psalms, some of them are just pure poetry. So a little bit harder to digest. I would say, I would probably find the New Testament a bit more…like I would, I would probably trust my understanding a bit more a little bit more, just because some of them are just mere instructions. You're like, just pure, like, just do this or do that or don't do this, you don't do that. So that's a lot more easier to

understand. But the Old Testament is probably bit more challenging. Yeah. And therefore I would have to like, probably try to consume it, either from a point of view of an expert, or like read it, and then and then and then consult someone else.

- **Respondent 11: Male, Graduate Student**
  I'm pretty confident with my understanding of the Bible. I mean, I've grown up with it, and went to Christian school, so had Bible classes. So I feel generally confident, engaging with it on my own. I know there's…I mean I haven't attended any actual Biblical training, but I think to the extent of my knowledge, it's decent.

- **Respondent 12: Female, Graduate Student**
  Um, I wouldn't say I'm like the most like, the highest expert of like the Bible. I definitely, I think that's a that's a little bit of a insecurity of mine, I definitely want to learn more. I think it's always hard for me to understand, like, how everything works together. And I think like, yeah, how everything works together chronologically. And like what…wo like, a lot of times where I get little insecure when I'm reading the Bible is like, there's so many Hebrew, like, Hebrew words, and like, just like, so many different words that have like, more deeper meanings, but like, I will gloss over it. And I'm just like, oh, is that what that meant? And like, when I hear people preaching, like, they break it down in like the Greek root word, and so I'm like, Man, this is super powerful and I just like glossed over it, you know? And it's just so like, I'm not super like confident. Like, I'm confident in like, knowing my experience with God and knowing that, like, I have a relationship with Him. And like, he points me to like scriptures that I will never forget. But like the Bible as a whole, like I want, I want to know more.

- **Respondent 13: Female, Graduate Student**
  I'm pretty confident. I would say 80%. Because I still figure out a lot of things from others, from sermons from like, like, what I'd say…conversation. You know, like, perspective. I feel like, it's good to read the Bible and know the story. But actually, digging into it with other people kinda like just helps you see it in a whole different way. So like, if I am reading my Bible, and I can relate to something, it's easier to grasp that but if I'm just reading something that is completely, I don't know, about lineage or whatever I'm just like, Okay, that's cool. And sometimes, it's hard to understand how certain stories pan out but then then you listen to a sermon and how it's explained. It's kind of like oh, okay. So having that perspective and then going back and reflecting it to my on situations, kind of like helps. So reading the Bible, yes. I like to like know the story know what it's saying. But for most parts that I don't understand, I like to…I prefer to talk to it about or with other people.

- **Respondent 14: Male, Graduate Student**
  Probably not very confident.

  I've always had the intention of devotions and of reading. And it's something that's like, intimidating. So just because I have a hard time on my own sometimes

interpreting it. And so hearing other people talk about it or discussing it is better. So not the best.

- **Respondent 15: Male, Professional**
  I'm pretty satisfied with my understanding of the Bible.

Part B: Sermons at St. Timothy's

1. How are the sermons at St. Timothy's similar to/different from other sermons you've experienced?

- **Respondent 1: Female, Graduate Student**
  Other ones are mostly like the preacher, peach or feels like a person who's close to God. At least for those good sermons that I feel like close to God, comprehend, pray very well and then got God's message and then give it to us. And then we as audience resonate, whereas for St. Timothy's there are some…You are encouraged to think and to build up that connection by yourself or build that understanding by yourself first, and then there are, of course, you and Vince's perspective, which help us sort of get a rounder understanding of that whole sermon, but I think the different thing is that I'm encouraged to pay…I feel like I am encouraged to, to be quiet, and to really connect to God. And that part I appreciate

- **Respondent 2: Male, Undergraduate Student**
  Um, I think they're different in the way that I'm just because of, like, it's a smaller congregation, it's so nice to be able to, like, feel like, I'm being spoken to personally, and, and I get to engage, as opposed to like, you know, any other church I've been to, it's like, there's so many people. And the pastor is speaking to everybody, obviously. But I feel more engaged at St. Timothy's. Like I literally don't have a second to, like, you know, wander off or think because it's like, I'm, like, you know, I get to engage in I get to speak personally about like, oh, well, how did this affect you personally, it's like, I can talk about things that, you know, I connect with, and it gives me a better understanding, because I could take things from my life and put into perspective, the things that we're learning, and it's like, oh, okay, I understand now posted just like, hearing it, you know, blindfolded and it's like, oh, well, um, so I definitely, like, how personal it is, and just how engaging and stuff

- **Respondent 3: Female, Graduate Student**
  They're different. But I think part of that is the benefit of a small church. So I think it's much easier to do the format that we're doing in St. Timothy's. Well, let me start by saying I quite liked the format at St. Timothy's with the you know, the responsive, you know, the ability to talk like, "what did you find in this text?" Which I think it'd be much, much harder to do in a larger church setting, which might be probably something you're considering for your own research, like, how do we implement this when there are more than 10 people here? But, no, I like the sermons and I find that they do help me engage particularly well. The only thing that I ever have any kind of issue with is if you get someone who is maybe a little bit crazy, and they can go off on you know…but I think both you and Vince do a really nice job of reigning that in. But I also recognize that the potential could be there for some problems.

- **Respondent 4: Female, Undergraduate Student**
  Yeah, so it's huge. It's like such a huge difference at St. Timothy's from any other church experience I've had in the past, because I've went to a couple of different ones at home. And then at St. Timothy's is so unique, because we open up this dialogue between me and God, rather than me just talking at God, I feel like we're, you know, in the past, growing up, I just felt like, I was talking, but there was no relationship. At St Timothy's we kind of have this ability to create that dialogue, and set up a narrative in it. And I also find it very like meditative as well. So that's definitely a great experience. Yeah.

- **Respondent 5: Female, Undergraduate Student**
  Yeah. So like I said, earlier, like, I'm from a Catholic church, so we do not speak. Okay, it's very structured, like, sing a little bit, listen to the Gospel, you know, listen to the priests talk, and give his homily. But that's really just like it, we just hear him talk, which I never really liked. Just because it's like, one, it's so easy to zone out and not really, like obtain anything. Like there'll be time, a lot of the times where me and my family were driving back and my mom's like, what did you learn? And I'm like, oh, like, I'm sorry. I like it totally just spaced out for me. And we're literally like, leaving the parking lot at the church. Like, it's so bad. Like, I really wish I could remember. But that's why I love, love, love, love St. Timothy's because it's very interactive. And I think, like, honestly, I really do think that has helped me grow so much in my faith, because it's like, instead of just like listening to somebody, like tell me, you know, which I think I love that just because, of course, they have more, I want to say like authority, or they have more knowledge than I do. So my opinion is not always going to be the right one or my interpretation isn't always going to be the right one. So like having that like, having a sermon just because you know, like, this is like when Vince he brings up the context of everything. Like that's so helpful because half the time I don't know the context of anything. So I'm like, I'm going based off of how I feel right now. Yeah. But yeah, so I love… Sorry, I just like detoured a lot but…Yeah, the interactive part really does help me because it helps me to see okay, how do I feel about this? Instead of somebody just telling me what I should think, you know, like, it gives me a chance to really think for myself and be like, okay, you know, this is how I feel, this is how I would…this is how I feel God is speaking to me, which I think is very important because it gives like, interactive work, it gives you a chance to listen to how God is speaking to you, rather than somebody speaking, somebody else speaking to you. Yes, they're speaking through God. But you know, we do have human issues. We're not, they're not perfect vessels

- **Respondent 6: Male, Graduate Student**
  Yeah, this is an easy one to answer, I would say, compared to other churches I've been to, it's much more reflective, and, as you say, much more active in terms of you know, not just the listening parts of the sermon, but also writing, and basically making us be active about thinking what the sermon means. And with my previous church in Mississippi, like, there was other guys who brought like notebooks and we'd write things down, like during this time, and then that's probably what I should

have been doing. St. Timothy's kind of makes us do that. But in a good way. It's not like forcing us I mean, and St. Timothy's doesn't force us to do it, it gives us the option. But it does that in a good way. Yeah. So that's the main difference about St. Timothy's is much more reflective. And I would say also personal as well, like, you know, in reality, there is less people than other churches that I've been to. So in that case, it can work. It can be more personal for each individual. You know, with blessings at the end. And another thing, I keep thinking about stuff, but another thing is, because there's less of us, we can actually share our thoughts during the sermon and express our thoughts to others, which is, I would say, you know, not something you'd have at other churches. So, yeah, I think I've said everything. Yeah.

- **Respondent 7: Male, Undergraduate Student**
  Yeah, it's way more active and engaging. Like with sermons, it's just like, I'm sitting there, and I'm listening to the person nodding my head. Someone might say, Amen. Somebody might like shout, the crowd. The crowd might be like, very energetic and just hear like, "AH!", but like with St. Timothy's just like, well, that still the kind of happens, but it's like…it's more like as I'm being preached to, I'm engaging in that preaching as well. I never really experienced that before ever. That's like…it's brilliant, like, I was just like I was, I was…I remember when I first got there. And like, you guys told to open up like the pamphlet, then I was writing down, just like I was like…it was hard for me not to be engaged into what you were preaching, and what was being said in the Bible. And you know the Bible is like, fully true. So like, and there's times where I hear the Bible I'm just like, you know, it's true, but I'm like, Yeah, sure, whatever. But that was like…it made it more applicable to me. So the difference is like, it's more active and more engaging.

- **Respondent 9: Female, Graduate Student**
  Um, there's a huge difference. Because first, we don't like, you know, when, when the pastor, the preacher comes in front, there's no way of stopping, like…that person is just like, you know, like, starting to pray, and then, like, started preaching, But at St. Timothy's there's like that, you know, reading this scripture, and then like, pausing for reflection, and then, you know, like, asking like, you know, you or Pastor Vince, ask, is there something that strikes you, something like that from the passage? So that's a huge difference

- **Respondent 10: Male, Professional**
  You know what I told Mariel is that I like…you know, I'll save that for the more in general, because you're talking about specifically about the sermon. I like the sermon because it's a lot more like, almost like Bible study, than an actual sermon. When I go to say, like XXXX? with Pastor, Pastor John, it's more of, it's very one sided. Like he doesn't really ask the crowd too much like it's more of just like him in this homily, but when we're at St. Timothy's, it's definitely more engaging, you know, we actually get to interact with the rest of the church. So it's a lot like Bible study. And I like that.

- **Respondent 11: Male, Graduate Student**
  Alright, so St Timothy's is probably the smallest and most interactive sermon I've been to. It's definitely more of a sense of community. Because of the size, it almost feels more like a Bible study than a church service sometimes, you know it focuses more on like personal and like what everyone's thinking rather than, you know, just like full analysis by the pastor. So it has pros and cons. I kind of appreciate that it doesn't push towards like one interpretation as much. But yeah it does rely a lot on more personal stuff.

- **Respondent 12: Female, Graduate Student**
  They're different. Um, because like at St. Timothy's, I feel like…I really do like the interactive approach. And I also love the historical context that's given. I know like some other churches do it too. But like, I think there's a lot of intentionality with like, understanding like…because if we have like, the the historical context, like affects how we're interpreting the Scripture, so like, we may have one interpretation andI know you can sort of gauge that from the, from a how interactive you are, right? Because you ask us questions, and we have certain responses based off of how we interpreted it. But then, like, for instance, like, if you or like Vince, like, start giving us more historical context, I'm like, Oh, wow, like, we were either like really wrong. Or just like, it was like, Oh, I hadn't even thought of that way. I'm like, Oh, that makes more sense. Like, you know, and so, that's one of the ways in which I feel like St. Timothy's is different. It's more interactive. And then there's also historical, like, context that's really given.

- **Respondent 13: Female, Graduate Student**
  Um, I think the main difference is the interactive component, where you read the Bible, and then you, you meditate on it, and then you share with people, everyone's given an opportunity to share what they thought about, they felt, or whatever questions they have. So it's definitely an interactive kind of preaching that I've never experienced anywhere else.

- **Respondent 14: Male, Graduate Student**
  This one is, like… well it's much smaller first of all. I've been to services that are, like 50 people to like 400 people. So this is a little bit different in the sense that you can actually hear yourself sing, but it's nice to have the chance for, like small fellowship with food before and after, which is similar to a couple churches I've been to. And then a couple of churches I've had have had like physical brochures…not brochures, physical paper with the passages and the questions. But not the worship music ,that's always been like, up in front but that's like such a small detail. Well, but in terms of like the, the sermon itself, and then after worship when we do the blessing, that's different. It seems much more like an intimate, smaller connection, which I think part of it has to do with the size. Like the last church I went to had, like several hundred people.

Yeah, it wasn't necessarily a lack of connection. But those churches are easier to kind of sneak in and sneak out if you want. Even though I did…I liked that church in the sermon and messages because as I said before, I think that one up until that point, last year was the was the best at like drawing upon messages and kind of relaying it to the world. I think it was just good for good, a good way to kind of challenge us. Yeah.

- **Respondent 15: Male, Professional**
  It's not similar to other sermons I've heard. I'm given space and time to apply the scriptures to my own life instead of hearing how the pastor applies it to him/herself

2. **How does our time of reading the scripture aloud help you engage with the Bible or help you apply it to your life?**

- **Respondent 1: Female, Graduate Student**
  Helpful. Also, I do appreciate if it's shorter verses sort of have twice. I actually, yeah, I was gonna say actually, everything should have twice but no, sometimes there are really long one. Maybe not. [laughing] I had to go back to…for me International…I have to go back to Chinese Bible because there are so many names and like places, I don't know what it's talking about.

- **Respondent 2: Male, Undergraduate Student**
  Um, I like reading it aloud with everybody, because it's, it's nice hearing everybody's different perspective. And opinions. I also, I think it can help apply it to my life or the Bible, because it's like, it's, it's not like overwhelming, like, like, it's nice, because it's just enough, and it's enough to sink in and understand. So I could take that, that and, and just apply it to my life or go back and, and dissect it even more and learn, you know, everything else about it? Um, yeah.

- **Respondent 3: Female, Graduate Student**
  So I think that's actually essential. But I think that you guys have also done a lot of scaffolding to teach your congregation how to do that. So one issue I have sometimes in churches, is it just like, "we're going to read this passage." And we're all like "Yay!" but there's no real sense of like, what am I supposed to do with it? Like, am I just listening to it because I know we're about to have a sermon on it? Or…so I like the framing, that's like, you know, just like calm down, don't think about it intellectually, like, what stands out to you. So in that sense, very useful to me as a spiritual exercise, which, you know, yes, I know, the Jesuit monks are all about this. But genuinely, I do find that to be a useful way of framing that that actually makes that time of Scripture reading more of a spiritual exercise than an intellectual one.

- **Respondent 4: Female, Undergraduate Student**
  Yeah, so this is something I really didn't do in other church services or contexts, and I had no idea that this was such a great tool for me. But hearing the text aloud, and then having that ability to, like, I think when you're listening, you can kind of key in on certain areas. And we've talked about how you know, God communicates with, you know, a specific piece. And then that enables me to kind of reflect on my own past and experience with God, and just being able to key in on that specific part of what I'm hearing. Whereas on my own, when I'm just reading a text, or someone's just talking at me and reading the text, I don't have that same meditative experience. I don't that that in and of itself is how we have the back and forth. Discussion with God is that meditation after we read the text, and so that's just such a cool tool that I think we've implemented. Yeah.

- **Respondent 5: Female, Undergraduate Student**
  Yeah, I mean, I just really help…I really think that it helps, you know, just connecting with God, you know, taking the time to like, pray like, Hey, what are you trying to tell me right now? What is this supposed to… like how is this supposed to resonate, if it is supposed to right now? You know, but I just think, yeah, it's just really helpful to just take that minute, a couple of minutes of silence and just say, like, Hey, God, like just quick prayer, "what are you trying to tell me?" and really connect with him. So that's why I really love it. Just because like, you actually get a chance to connect with God, one on one rather than, you know, like, just constant talking, you know?

- **Respondent 6: Male, Graduate Student**
  I think for me, it's great because someone else is reading it and therefore it takes away that component of myself having to read it so it gives me more like processing power to actually just listen and think about, like, what it means I can close my eyes and like, kind of brush away any distractions and I can just listen to what is being said as opposed to having to read and process in my brain. So therefore, I think it is good because it can just help me focus more compared to reading in myself. And that can help kind of strengthen or help interpret what it could mean, and what it could mean for my life. And yeah,

- **Respondent 7: Male, Undergraduate Student**
  Yeah. It's extremely powerful. Because like, when I'm in a regular church service, I want to do that. I don't really have time to do that. Then I just have to like sit back in my seat and think maybe eventually it's gonna come to me. Well, like at St. Timothy's just like wow…I actually have the time to like, I just felt like I heard something big and I actually have the time to like, kind of wipe my eyes and get like, a clearer vision, or somewhat clearer vision of what I actually heard. So yeah, it makes me like, I don't really know how to explain it, it kind of like, puts the Bible…widens the context of the Bible, or like my perspective of the Bible. When I have that time to actually think, I'm like a "think head," like I'm so like… I'm making all these cross references from what I heard in the past, and I relate it to my life, and I'm just like, I don't know, like, I'm reminded of something that just happened, like before the service or like a week ago and then all of a sudden, like, just like, something's here, something's here and boom, I realize that those two things are connected, and like a prayer is answered. Or like, something like, I don't know, I just hear…I'm going through something in the moment. And then I take that time and I just hear specific instructions from God. And quite frankly, it kind of helped me with like hearing from God and listening to God. Because I'm not usually a guy who like sits in silence a lot of the time, but this like active learning just showed me like…or this this active of learning in like a church context just kind of like encouraged me and pushed me into like maybe sometimes I just gotta like read over a scripture and just sit in silence. I don't have to like white knuckle through it until it's done. And I'm just like, I got it. You know, sometimes I could just like, take my… and that's why I've been doing, which is why I'm grateful to St. Timothy's. Like I've been…like before I was just like, Okay, I just got to read through Genesis, then Leviticus, then Numbers,

but now it's just like, I just have to, like, read, and allow God to like, speak to me as I'm reading. It's really…yeah, it's good.

- **Respondent 8: Male, Professional**
  Yeah, so when I, when, when you read it aloud, there's something about the acoustics of just that, sort of, you know, sonarary [sp?] process that is just really, really beautiful for me, and I've told you this over and over. And so there's something about just quite literally your voice that just invites the presence of God. And so you add that to the text. And so it's almost going to like a 3D movie, you know, like you put on the glasses, and you're in another dimension of this sort of, you know, sensory experience. And so when you read a text, I just hear the gentleness of the Lord just fall, and it just…there's almost a hushhness that comes over me and over that atmosphere. And I just feel the gentleness of an angel just quietly….it's like a bird that perches on a branch because it knows that this is a place that it can find rest. And so I feel the Holy Spirit rest in, in that moment when we invite the Lord's presence in that moments of silence. And I feel like in almost this very sort of old time, biblical Old Testament ways, your reading is almost a preparatory groan for that. And so there's something about the way you read it, and your voice and your intonation, your inflection, all of that, I think it's just your gifting. That's just your gifting. And, you know, you've heard it from so many people, because it's true. It has a way…and I think for me, knowing you, one of your gifting is to purify places and things, that is something that you're very good at, which is why I feel like you resonate so very well with like rules and purity. Because it just comes naturally to you. Right? Like, that's just your, your thing. And it's your thing, because I see it being articulated not just simply how you relate to circumstances in your life, but how even you approach the text and how you approach your ministry. When you literally open your mouth, you invite the purity of God. And so and so I feel it, it feels…so I feel like you open that space, like the tree cat be like moving in the wind, if you want the bird to come to perch on it to see. And I feel like what you do is that you calm that space, you purify it, you sanctify it. And so in that moment, you know, I just feel the presence of God. And sometimes I don't even have to speak to the Lord in that way, or even quite literally hear the Lord. It's enough just to exist in that moment and just feel the presence of the Holy Spirit. That is enough for me without the Lord saying a single word, or me saying a single word. And there are times that he does, and there are times when I do, but then there are times when I don't hear anything. And it's okay, because I feel everything. Yeah. And that's another way the Lord says, I'm here, I'm with you. And I don't have to say a word. You know, you know, sometimes just being with someone in that moment of silence without ever after exchanging a word, and that is enough. And for me, that's what that moment provides.

- **Respondent 9: Female, Graduate Student**
  Yeah. So when there's silence, it gives me, for me, a time to, okay, like, slow down, get myself to really focus on the words that I just heard. Because typically, the other

sermons are like, oh, yeah, they read it. And then after that, they pray and they're like, blah, blah. Which is sometimes it's good. But…

- **Respondent 10: Male, Professional**
  I like it because it introduced a new way for me….so I was born and raised Catholic. And say what you will about certain beliefs, but there are parts of the of the mass that I do think are …t's almost like it's almost like a sort of, like you know with Mr. Miyagi in Karate Kid he like teaches Daniel certain techniques and you and Daniel don't really understand why but like in the end, there's an actual function to it. I think a lot of the form, a lot of the parts of Catholic mass is that way. And I think that's why a lot of people criticize it, they just don't understand it. They think it's just some weird like, ritualistic ritual-filled service. But it reminds me… so what we're doing at St. Timothy's kind of reminds me of that. So when we pause, and we try to invoke the Holy Spirit, and as part of our understanding, like I love that, because it allows me to engage and exercise a part of my faith that I don't, I wouldn't readily exercise because like I said, like, I'm always up here in my head. And the way I would you know, when I listen to my podcast, I would always be just like, try to digest it mentally or intellectually, but when we listen…so when we do the passage, then we pause, and then we might pray for the Holy Spirit to come down and like inspire me, I feel like I'm exercising the heart part of worship, you know, the feeling and everything else that is non…Or maybe maybe it's subconscious, maybe even subconsciously, I would say. And to me, I think that's I think more people, I think, I think Christians need to do that a lot more. Definitely, I need to do that more, which is like, try to engage with the word, with the scripture with my heart. Yeah. So yeah, I think I think it makes that part of St. Timothy's, that part of our service like special to me.

- **Respondent 11: Male, Graduate Student**
  Um, I think reading the Scripture aloud is good. I think you know that's kind of like what it was originally written for, oral stories. So that part's good. Yeah, the silence after is good. I think it's hard to time, you know, because people will obviously finish thinking about that at different times. So sometimes it's not as effective as others, but…

- **Respondent 12: Female, Graduate Student**
  Yeah, no….so I like that we read things more than once. Because I've definitely incorporated, incorporated that actually to some of my like, in my Bible studies. Because, like, I know like, what makes me feel…like if I feel like I have a grasp on or at least I have a good foundation is like reading it more than once. And so to just leave room for that and it just being, like it being a normal thing to like…okay, it's understanding that like, you're not going to understand this all at once and that's okay. After like, one time and so like that…Sorry…what was the question?

  Yeah, no. Okay, so that's okay. I guess, like what I was saying before, but then also, the silence helps, too, because I think we're so used to just going from one thing to

the next. And I feel like people are very uncomfortable to sit in the tension of like, okay, so like, we spoke to God, but like, sometimes like we have to give him room to speak back, you know, and space to do that. And so I think, like, just us not being afraid of silence is what I take away from like, yeah, just having that moment of silence. And like repetition. So,

- **Respondent 13: Female, Graduate Student**
  Um, it's, I think, for most sermons, it's like, they'll read the Bible, and then the preacher would just talk about what they prepared on that. But I feel like St. Timothy's sermons will give you a chance to put yourself in the story. So it's a lot like you…personally, I read the word over and over again, and I replace wherever there's a human that I can put myself in and see how I relate to that. So it kind of like gives you an opportunity to just be in there, be immersed in that story. No, kinda like personalize it. It's really about you, or about this church, and God and this church and how we are together and with other people outside. So it kind of gives me the chance to like, okay, so this word is for me, what is it saying to me? How is it making me feel?

- **Respondent 14: Male, Graduate Student**
  Usually…I'm not the first one to speak so usually it takes me until people kind of find some things that spoke to them to help me understand, understand a little bit more with the passage of saying. But terms of like how it allows me to connect more, you said, how allows me to connect more with…

  Like initially, it's not too much. It's not until we have like more conversation and those guiding questions that I'm able to think a little bit more.

- **Respondent 15: Male, Professional**
  Hearing the scripture is different than reading it. When I'm reading it's easier to distance myself from the text thinking: what does this mean? When I'm hearing it, it helps me experience: what is God saying to me?

3. **How does our time of sharing about the scripture as a community help you engage with the Bible or help you apply it to your life?**

- **Respondent 2: Male, Undergraduate Student**
  Um, I think just hearing everybody's different…like, how they heard it, everybody's different perspective. Because even though, you know, might be one passage or scripture or story, whatever. It could mean so many things to different people. So it's nice to see how like, it's just like the…it's infinite, what it could mean to everybody. Like, it's just like, there's so much there. And it gives you like, a more broad perspective, like, it's like, oh, I didn't look at it that way. Or like, I mean, even last night, like, service last night, it's like, it's so nice to hear everybody's different… It's like, oh, I didn't think about that. Or like, Oh, I didn't think about how that show could correlate to a Bible passage, or something like that. So it's just nice how everybody has a different like, a journey you know

- **Respondent 3: Female, Graduate Student**
  Something similar to what I said earlier with if I'm in one of my little spiral pits of anger, it's like "no, no, you could view it *this* way." So I…it's genuinely helpful in that it forces me to look at scripture from a different perspective from someone who is at a different place in their spiritual walk with God. And a lot of times that can help reorient me. And again, like sometimes it's not particularly helpful when you get someone that I'm like, what? interesting. Okay. But that's Life, right? Like, that's community. That's, you know, like, you got to figure out how to work with that. So I guess in a sense, it is useful in terms of like, all right…[Learning how to extend grace?]

  Exactly. And like, as long as the person is well intentioned, I am fine with working with it. It really is just I don't I don't understand the words you just said. I will say too, sometimes it's hard to hear.

- **Respondent 4: Female, Undergraduate Student**
  Yeah, um, this is a little more challenging. I think this is also helpful, but maybe, um, I don't know. Um, I think it is really helpful to hear what other people have keyed in on. And it doesn't necessarily give me insight on like, myself or what I just reflected on but it kind of gives me insight into others and how their experience just differs from mine, which in and of itself, like kind of, I guess, in turn heightens my experience as well. Sorry it's kind of a convoluted answer. Yeah, I think just hearing what other people key in on and reflect on is helpful, because then it kind of enables me to reflect back and think oh, yeah, like, I hadn't really thought about that, or I hadn't considered that. And so just creating that discussion, not between myself and God, but between myself and God and the other people around us praying together. I think that's that's a hugely helpful tool.

- **Respondent 5: Female, Undergraduate Student**
  Yeah, I mean, I love it just because it helps me see other point of views that I really like, didn't think like… Even yesterday, when Aldrine, he was talking about the, the how Jesus obeyed his parents, and he like pointed that out. That's something that I like skimmed over, but it's so important, like, he was like, and even for us, it's like, we can be like, Okay, well, I'm gonna obey God, I don't want to do it, but I'm gonna obey Him. But it's like, that has such a big point. And literally just one word that I skimmed over. So I think it's a great way to kind of just, you know, learn more, you know, through other people. Yeah. And it's a great conversation. I love the community, that you guys have put together and just being able to, you know, be open and just connect in that way. Yeah, yeah.

- **Respondent 6: Male, Graduate Student**
  I think, yes, the main thing is to see get to hear like other perspectives. And, you know, things you didn't think about from someone else, I mean, you can kind of take kind of what God's saying to them, you know, and kind of gain multiple perspectives. But ultimately, it's what God's telling us. But yeah, I think that's how it's helpful just hearing other perspectives. Also, I always try and have the desire to, like, share something. So it's encourages me more to listen to what God's telling me as opposed to like, the normal sermons like going through the motions me like, you know, I don't have to, like, speak up or anything, you know, and therefore, it kind of makes you slack off. But it kind of just keeps you accountable, and gives me a desire to share more. So, yeah, yeah.

- **Respondent 7: Male, Undergraduate Student**
  Yeah. Yeah, it was scary at first. I'm not really like a speaker person, but it's extremely impactful because like, it's almost like, because I know there's…Let me see. I think in Proverbs or something tit says: "By the fruit of our mouths we're filled with good things" or something like that. So just like it's practice training me to like actually speak what's on my heart. Speak what I feel like God's telling me on my heart, speak what I feel like this is speaking to me on my heart. And, like, yeah, it helps me. And like, I know, there's a Bible verse that says, you know, by the blood of the Lamb and the words of our testimonies we overcome…basically the devil ,by the blood of the lamb and the word of our testimony…I hear other people what they say, I'm just like, whoa, that's completely like answering some deep thing I've been praying about, or deep thing I've been thinking about. So yeah, it's like, it kind of brings the Bible to life when that happens to me, because I'm just like, Okay, this is not just me. It's just not in my head. Like, and like I'm seeing like, Oh, this is not like some just made up thing. Like, I'm seeing it manifest as like, I'm literally hearing from other people and it's helping me. I'm helping…I'm speaking and then like, as I'm speaking, I feel more…for lack of better terms, I feel more filled when I speak. Like I'm letting go of words, but I feel way more filled. Like it kind of helps me with my boldness too because I mean, it's not a super big group but there's still like people I don't like necessarily know too deeply like I know my brother. Like I say anything to my brother. I'm not gonna say anything to anybody else. So it just like

yeah, it just helps me like bring the Bible to life and helps me get…it gives me the confidence to go deeper into the Bible and actually, like, actively…um what's the word? Is it follow? I'm gonna say follow. Actively follow the Bible in my everyday life. Other than just like strictly like, do this don't do this. Do this. Don't do this. Do this. Don't do this. Kind of like, make it like, make the Bible…I don't know. Make the Bible like my lifestyle in a sense.

- **Respondent 9: Female, Graduate Student**
  Actually, it…I typically get surprised when I listen to a different, when I hear, you know, for example, some other people who are like saying, Oh, this impacted me, I was like, Oh, I never see it that way. So I think I'm hearing from other people, like when you or Pastor Vince ask, help me in having a wider perspective.

- **Respondent 10: Male, Professional**
  So let me preface it by saying that I um….I know it doesn't look like it, but I'm actually very introverted. I promise you,I could show you my multiple, like, psychological, like personality tests to prove it. I'm just, I'm just learning to be a bit more sociable. But so that that social part of of worship, you know, fellowship, I would consider it part of the fellowship as well. Because I'm getting to know the opinions of my fellow church-mates. I don't know. So, the word that that that came to me as is collective, collectivism, you know and I think that is one of the overarching desires or goals of just Christianity right, of us as Christians is for us to be united as one in in mind and heart and spirit. I definitely feel like Paul, the reason why Paul, if I had to guess the reason why Paul wrote all those letters to his churches his instructions, is to try to unite his churches Right. Or at least the way we use it now is that is for us to do so. So definitely the the sharing and discussion part I think brings us more together as a church and it allows me to hear ideas and perspectives that I myself may or may not think of or may not feel. So I think it's also a very important aspect of it. And it's, it's not really something that you would readily get from a regular service, right? Usually everybody goes there and they listen to the pastor and then they go home. And then maybe maybe if they're like, if they do some fellowship afterwards, maybe a small part of the group is actually I don't know…maybe really felt the the word or the scripture and would discuss it with their fellow church mates. But I feel like most of the fellowship that goes on after service, after church is probably more personal, and no longer involving the scripture that we just listened to so, yeah.

- **Respondent 11: Male, Graduate Student**
  I mean, it's generally good. I feel like a lot of people haven't engaged with Biblical analysis as much. So maybe they're not always bringing something new to the table that I find as helpful. But generally, the responses from Vince are good, so pros and cons.

- **Respondent 12: Female, Graduate Student**
  Yeah, no, that's a good question. I think like, in those moments, I…it's one of those things where I think people try to tie their circumstances to scriptures rather than allowing the scriptures to, to shape their views. So I think it at least cautions me to be like, Okay, this is what I'm going through my life. But like, is this something that I'm just trying to, like, make this sort of, oh, this is what Scripture says to support it. Or this is what Scripture says to do about it. To not like, take my circumstances and like, use it to shape the word, but also like to use the word to shape…Okay, how should I view my circumstances? And so that's sort of like, I don't know if that's answering your question. But that's kind of what I take away from those moments of like reflection and like sharing our stories.

- **Respondent 13: Female, Graduate Student**
  Um, like I said before, it's other people's perspectives and experiences that kind of, like, make it more exciting and give it a wider view, like, oh, yeah, that makes sense. And like, oh, yeah, I can relate to that. So it kinda like gives you a chance to see how everyone else is relating to that word. And it also kind of like, gives you a chance to like, experience that you're in a place where everyone is just accepted as they are and that freedom to share all of those sometimes vulnerable situations, it's it's, it's special. Yeah, so I feel like it helps you look at the word in a different perspective. So there's, everyone gets to share whatever they feel like sharing. And then there's what the preacher prepared. So there's a pretty varied approach to the word and I feel like it gives a chance for each and every person to relate to that instead of just having a solid message that might not apply to you or make you feel like it's targeted to you. So yeah.

- **Respondent 14: Male, Graduate Student**
  Ummm…it helps me draw on like specific moments of my life. So I know some of the questions like specifically ask about that. But I think that reflection is good and something that I do really value is it's not…I can't always answer the questions in the service or in the couple minutes we have to try and think about a little bit more of like, what does this word mean, in the context of this? And it challenges me to just reflect.

- **Respondent 15: Male, Professional**
  I enjoy hearing how God is speaking to people in our community. It may be similar to what I'm hearing for myself or very different. But God is speaking.

4. **How does writing in your bulletins or reflecting on the questions asked in the bulletins help you engage with the Bible or help you apply it to your life?**

- **Respondent 1: Female, Graduate Student**
  Yeah, I think, but to me, honestly, I feel like it's very similar to active listening I similar in a sense that I do not see them to either is too heavy or like, heavier than the other. I feel like they are working together. Like sort of reflect and comprehend what, what's taught in our own life, then pray to God, that kind of thing.

  […] Yeah, and also for me, because before I like to write everything, but now I would prefer to spend time to think more and I do not write things. Because I I realized later even though I write things, and then I do not really go back and read them. So I would prefer to spend more time in the praying and I think so me, yeah, active, pausing and writing

- **Respondent 2: Male, Undergraduate Student**
  Um, I think it really helps me because I'm somebody who, like I'm a very like, hands on learner, like I need to do like physical things like. Also, I am like a visual learner. So I like being able to like, write it down. And also, I think it could help because it's like, I save all those. So it's nice to be able to like and a few years from now go back and see how what we were studying at the time may have affected me then and then how it's affecting me now or something and like to see the growth. You know, it's like a journal like your you know? And it's, yeah, I think it's also sometimes it's easier to write your thoughts down opposed to like speaking them so personally. Um, so I really enjoy that aspect of service.

- **Respondent 3: Female, Graduate Student**
  Well, I never write in the bulletins because I'm writing in my little journal instead. But I am actually answering the questions from the bulletins. So what I find…like it's helpful in the moment. And that, again, a lot of the bulletin questions are very self reflective very much like "how are we going to apply this" which is 100% what I want, but it's also helpful for me in that since I'm doing it in journal, I'll go back and read. So I'll have the questions. I'll have the answers later. And sometimes my answers change and sometimes they don't and that's an interesting progression to see. But I like having things written down. I'm…that's just generally how I learned like, I like that better than just someone asking me the question verbally. I like having it in black and white in front of me where I'm like, I can analyze this word by word now.

- **Respondent 4: Female, Undergraduate Student**
  Oh, yeah. So this is, um, this is so huge, because I think when we have those moments of like, kind of meditative thought, and thinking about what sticks out to us, this is kind of the why, like, how can I now apply this back to my life? How can I apply this in what I'm doing? How can I change? And so it's kind of that analysis piece, I feel like, for myself, and it's, it's, it feels like this ability to have like life

revisions, basically. And it just kind of solidifies that conversation I've had, and then it gives me something to go back to later in the week as well. I can reread and be like, oh, yeah, that's what that's the feeling I had, or that's what God's telling me. So I think the writing piece is also super important.

- **Respondent 5: Female, Undergraduate Student**
  Yeah, I mean, for me, personally, I know when I'm reading the Bible, I like to, you know, underline, write down notes, you know, just because it's not all going to stay in my head. I will forget stuff. I can barely remember a verse, so I'm gonna need to write it down. Just because it's, you know, it's something I can always go back to. And it's just like, writing it down, kind of like clicks in my brain, you know, like, Okay, this is what's, you know, being said, rather than just like saying it in my head, and then like, letting it drift off. No, I really do like the writing

  […] And it could just be like, bullet points too like, that's usually what I do. Like, I'll write like, a few key words and be like, Okay, this is what this means. And then like, I know, my brain, so I'll be able to explain it. Maybe not to somebody else. But yeah.

- **Respondent 6: Male, Graduate Student**
  I think it helps me reflect on what the text says, in terms of what's like read in the sermon, and helps me… normally the task is like later on, like, how can you relate this to your life? Or, you know, what prayers do you have for God, and they can kind of help me with use that text to apply it to my life. And just by writing it down. Yeah, and, you know, with the booklets, we can take those with us so we can utilize what we wrote down. And, like, take it with us, and that can be helpful.

- **Respondent 7: Male, Undergraduate Student**
  Yeah. Yeah, I got…it's kinda like teachers always say, like, you know, it's like always better to write something down to remember. Sometimes, like, I'll end up like writing this scripture…just that's what I just do normally whenever I have like a pen and paper in church and just write down scripture. But when I'm writing down my thoughts, I don't necessarily do that in a church atmosphere like it's just like because I'm afraid I'm gonna miss something. But when I have like time to like do that it's just like, Oh, wow. Like I probably like put everything…my mind in order. So that when I get new information, I don't have to worry about it being jumbled and stuff like that. How it helps me like understand the Bible and stuff like that. It's like, again, like it's different when all that's in your head. Because like, it could get confusing. It could get conflated with a whole bunch of different other thoughts that are not in the Bible, that sound similar, sounds like it makes sense. Then you write it out on paper and just like wait. Like there are multiple times I wrote it down and just like oh, that's not it. That's like, after like…to kinda like, see, like, wait that's not what the Bible says. Hold on. Because like in my head, I'll like hear a Bible verse and I'll just add stuff to it. I don't know why that happens. Or like, I'll maybe hear some from God. And I'll just add stuff to it down. And when I write it down I'm just like, Wait, this does not correlate with what it says in John 16 or whatever we're talking

about. So it helps me like…just writing down and have the time to reflect just helps me solidify and kind of like narrow down on the Bible and kind of like, take everything else out the way that's not in the Bible and focus on like, what the truth is, despite like, you know, all this other thoughts that can be hitting me in the face, so it makes me more focused when I'm writing stuff down.

- **Respondent 8: Male, Professional**
  I think for me, it allows me to think much more intentionally than I would, right? Because when I'm usually in that moment, oftentimes the thing that sort of accelerates for me is my emotions. Like I feel the spirit, I start crying, I feel accepted, I feel loved. And when I begin to ride out these things, it just switches gears to me quite literally being in the classroom. And then I have to sort of rest on another set of skill sets, right? And that is my mind. And then I get to really logically, well, how does this apply to what I'm thinking? And it gives words, to my feelings. And and so…it's a thing that I never thought that I needed, because I felt like how I was feeling, either through tears or just through the sense of just gladness that I have when you're… when you feel the presence of God. But then in that moment, you really get to say, Alright, how does what you're feeling now, how does this relate in very intentional ways with what you're going through and the questions that you've been thinking about? And until you quite literally set paper to pen and write it down, it doesn't become as clear. And so for me, I think what it does is add another added advantage where oftentimes I put my logical brain, I leave it at the door, and I'm like, let me engage God viscerally. And then the Lord is like, I know why you put your brain at the door, because oftentimes, it's been an obstacle for you. And I want to engage you in a dimension that is spiritual, that is not limited, you know, to your logic. But there is a time where I feel like the Lord is like, okay, how can this be applied to some of the things that you're getting? And I wouldn't have that intentional…and that's the way I would describe it. I describe it as a deeply Scholastic, intentional, deliberate moment of transference, right? Where that becomes applied and I'm like, Okay, what does this mean for me? And so I'm forced in that moment to answer that question. Because in that moment, when you're feeling the presence, you just want to stay there, you want to ball your eyes out, you just want to say YES! Jesus! Give it to me, Lord, give it to me! You don't want to do anything else because it feels so good. And you don't want to quit or do anything else. But then it really allows you practical guidance, to say, actually, this is what I'm feeling. And this is how I'm making sense of what I'm feeling, given everything that has happened. And when you ask us to write our prayers down, I've always loved that. And you drop it in the box, you know? I've always loved that moment. Because there are times where I feel like, for me, it's always beautiful when I find other ways of praying to God, right? And so for me, it's another form of prayer when I would write it down when I drop it in. Sometimes…and this is what my mom has taught me. She's like, don't even have to write anything. You just… because sometimes, she's not gifted with education and so writing doesn't come easily for her. And, and sometimes she's like, she just drops it in empty. And it's written…so there's so much about that entire process. But because writing does, it does mean something for me. It might not mean the same thing as it does for her. But for me, it does mean

something. So I do find value in the writing. But sometimes I…there are times where my words aren't enough. And you and I have spoken sometimes I'm like, How do I pray this? Because if I don't get it, I mean, there's something that's wrong in my prayer. So I tried five different ways of saying the same thing to get God's attention, right? You turn the key a different way. You're like, look, let me just try again. Right. And, and clearly, that's not what the Lord is saying. But in that moment, that's what I feel. And so there are times where I don't want to write anything, because I feel like everything I've written has not been enough. And then I take my mom's approach, and I just drop an empty…you know, so in that moment for me, it means so much.

- **Respondent 9: Female, Graduate Student**
  I absolutely love it. Because I'm the type of person who like, takes down notes. So when I'm not given a time to write down it's hard. And you will see my notes later, after it's like, what did I write here. But then you giving us time helps me to really, you know, write down my thoughts. Typically I like writing like interconnect… I like to connect things. So I draw a lot of arrows. So that time helps me to connect and also to branch out, you know, like draw some branches, helps me to organize my thoughts and to let my thoughts flow and to be more…what do you call that? Immersed to what's open in the Word.

- **Respondent 10: Male, Professional**
  Again, I think it goes hand in hand with the discussion part. And the time of silence, I think they all together…all those things work together. I mean, you know, we can quote, peer reviewed articles on like, the effectiveness of academic styles like that. And we're basically doing the same exact thing. It's repetitive, it's repetitive consumption of information in different mediums. I am a very audible learner. So I don't probably, if you would look, I don't write a lot during our…but someone might find that the most helpful way of consuming the scripture. Like maybe they barely, you know, maybe they're not as good as hearing it, but like when they write it down, like that's when that's when the spirit comes to them. So yeah, I think multiple styles of consuming the Scripture is the most effective, is a very effective way. So,yeah.

- **Respondent 11: Male, Graduate Student**
  I think it's good. So it forces you to actually clarify your thoughts around it, you know, even if you think you know, having to actually create more of an answer to it is good. I mean, admittedly, I don't actually write the answers in much. And sometimes they feel more like a fill in the blank, of like, what they're just going to say in the service, but it's a good resource to have available.

- **Respondent 12: Female, Graduate Student**
  Yeah. I think…that's a really good question. Yeah, I think it gives me a sense of gratitude. That my situation is not unique, right? Like, so like, I look at the scripture, and I'm just like, Okay, God has like, already fought for me in this area, before and over and over and over again. So like anything like it just pours me into, like, knowing that the answers are in the scriptures are there in his words, like, at the

end of the day, reflecting on that just points me back to his word. So I'm just…Yeah, so that's how'd I answer that.

- **Respondent 13: Female, Graduate Student**
  I think it's, it's definitely first and foremost helped me in my personal study, because it's kinda like how… it's kinda like a guide to meditate on the Word. So apart from like just doing that on Sundays, it's improved how I engage Bible reading on my own at the same time. It…like I said, already, it kinda like personalizes it, because those questions is, how do you think this word applies to you today? Or how do you think Jesus is calling you to do something today? So it gives you a chance to really reflect and see how you can actually apply this word in your life. So it's not just a general thing where they tell you to go and be generous. But what are *you* going to do about being generous? How is God calling *you* to do that? So it's….yeah, that's the main thing it personalizes it, and helps you talk to God and yourself and see where you're being called to or how you're being called as well.

- **Respondent 14: Male, Graduate Student**
  Ummm…it helps me draw on like specific moments of my life. So I know some of the questions like specifically ask about that. But I think that reflection is good and something that I do really value is it's not…I can't always answer the questions in the service or in the couple minutes we have to try and think about a little bit more of like, what does this word mean, in the context of this? And it challenges me to just reflect.

- **Respondent 15: Male, Professional**
  Writing helps clarify. Helps make it more real. I may think: this is what God is saying to me but I can easily dismiss or forget it. When I write it down it has more conviction. It's more concrete, more real.

5. **How does sharing what you wrote down or reflected on help you engage with the Bible or help you apply it to your life?**

- **Respondent 1: Female, Graduate Student**
  Okay, so helpful. Actually…okay… I'm gonna be honest about like, from my personal view, I feel like it's helpful if I speak out, if I have the chance to speak out, because that means I am declaring and then I'm acknowledging loudly. In terms of listening to others, I wouldn't…I won't say all of them are helpful, because sometimes there could be…I cannot hear. I just like sometimes the voice and masks and people have accents. For me, international student, is it hard for me. But also in terms of resonating, I do not always resonate with people but I know the sharing is so important, from my own experience that once you share, it's helpful, mostly for yourself. So go ahead and share it. But as listening to others, I know we say that, yeah, that that's that kind of sharing, do you encourage each other, which is the case, but in the sermon, environment I don't feel I don't have a strong feeling about that. In our online, you know, smaller group, those sharing, I resonate a lot, and I feel like those support are more, but honestly, in sermon, maybe we're not that close. So that was that was, yeah, neutral or intermediate.

- **Respondent 2: Male, Undergraduate Student**
  I think it helps by the response that that I get, you know what I mean, from from like, you or Vince, I might share something that's like, oh, and then you know, you might give me some, like, advice or something, or, or, you know, I think that's what helps. And then also, it's like, that's like a great springboard for somebody else to then share their experience or what, how that also affects them or something. So it's just like it, it kind of everything bounces off of everything and each other. So I like that.

- **Respondent 3: Female, Graduate Student**
  Depends on the context again, very contextual here. Because I don't always share I often don't. Depends with like…I'm more likely to share...the smaller the group, the more likely I am to share. And I don't feel the need to share everything. So I would say more having the option to share is helpful for me. Because generally when I do it is because I want feedback on something because I don't understand something or because I need to actually say something to make it real. And actually having it out there, you know, makes that commitment makes it real, and also signals to other people that this is something that, you know, I need people around me to care about too, like, either be accountable or because I'm struggling with it or, or I need help solving it or so it's sort of a way of putting it out there in the community where if you have a healthy community, I think that's an incredibly helpful step. If you have an unhealthy community its kind of like feeding it to piranhas. But I don't I don't I don't find that to be the case and St. Timothy's.

- **Respondent 4: Female, Undergraduate Student**
  Oh, yeah. So this is, um, this is so huge, because I think when we have those moments of like, kind of meditative thought, and thinking about what sticks out to us, this is kind of the why, like, how can I now apply this back to my life? How can I apply this in what I'm doing? How can I change? And so it's kind of that analysis piece, I feel like, for myself, and it's, it's, it feels like this ability to have like life revisions, basically. And it just kind of solidifies that conversation I've had, and then it gives me something to go back to later in the week as well. I can reread and be like, oh, yeah, that's what that's the feeling I had, or that's what God's telling me. So I think the writing piece is also super important.

- **Respondent 5: Female, Undergraduate Student**
  Yeah, I think it just gives, like another point of view that I wouldn't have thought of, you know, just because I live my life and I'm like, Okay, well, this relates to my situation now. I wouldn't…I think that's the first thought that I have, rather than okay, what is the situation I've never been put in and how could that relate to you know, this? So I definitely do like other people's point of views, because it helps me, you know, broaden my horizon in what, you know, God is trying to say

- **Respondent 6: Male, Graduate Student**
  I think it helps me apply the Bible to my life. I don't know if it you know, the whole kind of the sermon is not only what challenges me in terms of, you know, gives me desire to read the Bible. But yeah, in terms of the practical tasks, I would just say it helps me reflect on how it can affect my life, and it just helps me understand what the Bible could be saying. I don't think that part of the sermon is what improves, like my desire to read. I think the sermon is what does that but yeah, thinking probably just like understanding what it means.

- **Respondent 9: Female, Graduate Student**
  The times of sharing…typically I don't share (laughs). But you know, other people share and then it also helps me to see okay this is where they are at. And so that will also help me see okay, where am I at then? It helps me to… I dunno…it gives me an in a way like a mirror to see, okay, if they see this, how about me? Not in a comparative way, but in a good way. Good comparison.

- **Respondent 12: Female, Graduate Student**
  Um, so I guess collectively, when we all share, and we all hear our stories, I feel a sense of freedom. So like, to me, I'm like, God's word is like, it frees us, it's like life to us. Like that's what a scripture says. And so like when you hear other people's testimonies, when we're having that time not only speaking mine, but hearing others, like it reminds me of that scripture about how like we overcome not only by the blood of lamb and the words of our testimonies. So it's like when you hear somebody's going through something, you're like, oh, my gosh, but it sets you free, because it's like, I've been through that too. And I don't need to be ashamed. Right? And this is what the like the Bible says about it. So like relating that back and like

reflecting on the body. Like it just…yeah, it's just more encouraging to know that, like, you know, we're all in this together. And we can overcome.

- **Respondent 13: Female, Graduate Student**
  Not really, for me, it's more of like, it has always kind of like looked like engaging with the people around you, and kind of like building relationship and being vulnerable with each other and praying with each other. So I just haven't thought about it as in relation to reading the Bible.

- **Respondent 14: Male, Graduate Student**
  I don't want to use the same word, but I think it's further reflection. And by that, I mean, it's not just of what I've done in my life but sharing and hearing about others perceptions is a good way to understand how other people connect with the passage and how other people just may have had similar or completely different interactions related to what we're talking about. So think, like perspective is very, is quite valuable. And so it allows me to get a perspective on the instances in everyone else's life that decided to share and how they connect with that. Which for me, gives me a better understanding of what that passage is trying to say.

- **Respondent 15: Male, Professional**
  Sharing aloud in a community makes it even more real and concrete than writing. I mean I said it. No one made me. I own it in front of my community.

6. **How do guided meditations help you engage with the Bible or help you apply it to your life?**

- **Respondent 1: Female, Graduate Student**
  Very helpful. I make notes in my Bible so that I can remember but even that, like now I can talk about talk it out, like some rough situation, that means it's helpful. Yeah, I will. Yeah. So I think it's helpful.
  that whole sermon, but I think the different thing is that I'm encouraged to pay…I feel like I am encouraged to, to be quiet, and to really connect to God. And that part I appreciate

- **Respondent 2: Male, Undergraduate Student**
  um, I, I think we have, um, I, I like it, I think it's nice, because it's like, when you're at church, that's all you have to focus. It's like, you're, you're, you're out, you left, like, in my opinion, it's like, whatever I have behind me, I've left like I'm at church. And this, the only reason why I'm here is for God. So I don't have to worry about anything else for this next hour and a half or whatever. And it's nice, because you're in the house of the Lord. So you know, you could just close your eyes and the silence that you get and just think about whatever it is that we're thinking about. And then, and yeah. Yeah, I enjoy it. I think it's nice. It's like a great way I think to sort of regenerate and like, think about a lot of processes sink in and see what I've really like, tried, like, because I know you guys like you'll say like, try and listen to what God's telling you. Like, or like God speak to you. And then like, I love how you and Vince always say like, we're listening, like, Father, please speak to us. We're listening, like, it's a great way to just like, sit there and be like, Oh my god, like, what? What do you say to me? Like, I'm here to listen, like, I'm not doing anything else right now. Listen. Yeah, like, and that's something I've been trying to, like, get better at is just sitting there and trying to really, because like, that's something I've I've sort of been struggling with lately is like, I just feel like I'm not really at a point where I feel like God speaks to me. And I'd like to be there. And like, it's sort of hard for me to understand because I'm like, how do you I just don't understand like how, you know, because sometimes I feel like, Oh, I feel like God might be telling me this or like something is telling me like, I have a strong feeling to do this. But I'm like, I don't know, I would hope it's God. But like I just so I think that when we do that, that's really a great exercise for me. Because like I said, it's been something I'm trying to get better at doing.

- **Respondent 3: Female, Graduate Student**
  I actually found that to be one of the most helpful things. Because my inclination is sometimes again, to go at it academically and to read it over for like, what can I learn from this passage without stopping to be like, okay, but…and the other thing too, is I have a tendency, whenever I read anything with like Jesus, or God, my default setting is that they're saying something harshly, or in anger. And this is something I've learned is that because tone is so important, and the Bible doesn't always give you a ton of helpful tags that are like, "and he says this kindly." The message of it

changes massively, depending on what you know, Jesus's tone is when he's speaking the thing. So the guided meditation a lot of times like you or Vince encourage a warmer, nicer tone. Allowing myself to imagine Jesus speaking that way is actually like, “well, that's interesting.” The whole passage kind of changes. “I'm warmly telling you this thing that I want you to you know, change you're correct,” rather than like “Sinner, burn!” forces me to engage with it perhaps in a more healthy way.

- **Respondent 4: Female, Undergraduate Student**
  I've definitely…I think we've done this a couple times. And I was there. And it was, again, it's so it was so unique. It was such a, like, new experience for me. And it really helped me to visualize what life was like, at the time of Jesus. And at the time, you know, that the Bible is being constructed. And I think that nowadays, it can be hard to connect back to that time, and the Bible, such like a traditional text, it can be hard to apply it to your own life, but to have that ability to connect back and think and put yourself in the shoes of the people that came, you know, such a long time ago. It really helps me to bring that piece into the present, and then further apply what I've learned. And it just helps me gain a better understanding of the period and the text itself. And how we really haven't changed all that much, you know, emotionally. And so it just deepens my connection with God and Jesus, and yeah, I really, I think it's a great experience. Yeah, I'm sorry. I feel like I don't have a good answer.

- **Respondent 5: Female, Undergraduate Student**
  I mean, I love them just because like, that's one of the ways that I've really like, got into prayer is by like, guided meditation. And I still use that to this day. And I think it helps so much, because it's like, it's a key, you know, that you can use for the rest of your life. And you can tweak it as you go along. But I definitely think that helps me connect with the Bible more by connecting like to myself like, okay, like I said earlier, like this is, this is what's being said in the Bible, how would this relate to my situation with God, you know, and kind of just bringing that connectivity, if that's a word, to me and God.

- **Respondent 6: Male, Graduate Student**
  Yeah, I think I think they’re good cause it kind of, it puts you in like a…it's like a real life. It's not always real life scenario, but it's like something you can actually picture. And then, you know, God's word is used to…or sorry, the analogy is used to help you understand what God is telling us or what God has in store for us. And I think just being able to use that imagery is helpful. In terms of…I don't know if it again, I don't know if it improves my desire to read, like, read the Bible, but I think for me, it's kind of more feels like, the blessings feel more like a blessing. It's just like, something great to hear like, just kind of a reminder, like God is there with me. Yeah, I don't know if I remember doing the meditations during the sermon

- **Respondent 7: Male, Undergraduate Student**
  Yeah, those guided meditations always bring me back to the Bible. They make me want to like read the Bible a little bit more, because I'm just like…it makes me…I wouldn't even say I have a vivid imagination, but my imagination is just always like, it's very descriptive. I guess it's vivid. It's very descriptive. Like just like, Wait, like, I always makes me want to go back to the Bible and just read and just like, read over the Scripture over and over and over again, and just think. I remember one time, or not one time, I remember like, I guess a couple of months ago, when we were doing the thing about or Vince was doing the thing about, like the Thanksgiving table. Like, I imagined that it was just like, whoa. Like, I was just like…I just remember in my head was just like, whoa. I'm thinking about memories and stuff like that. And I was just like, it left me with so many answers, and also left me with so many questions. And I always want to know, okay, what, what happens next, like, you know…I remember, like, I'm going all over the place, but like, I remember, like, a whole bunch of like, other verses that I heard that are, like, similar to that. So that makes me want to go back to those verses. Like, I don't know, my mind just like kind of like puts everything all together. And right in front of me. I'm just like, I have to make sense of this somehow. So I go back to the Bible. And now like, I see myself reading the Bible more. Like even when I come into St Timothy's and there were times where I did come to St. Timothy's and I was just like, I'm kind of ehhhh about reading the Bible. You know like life just gets in the way. But like, I go to St Timothy and it's just like, oh, this is like the real deal. Like this is the book of life for real. Let me try to like figure out like. It's like, almost given me like renewed passion to read the Bible. Just like, actually, like, going through that imaginative process, just kind of like seeing without actually like seeing it. Like seeing inside your head. It just makes you like, Yeah, always want to go back to the Bible.

- **Respondent 9: Female, Graduate Student**
  Yeah, I think because of those guided meditations, I started to really put myself in that picture. I actually didn't do that before. I've never done it before. But then, when we started doing that, I feel like I'm really in there. And it helps me to see, you know, like, how does it feel like there, even like, I'm trying to even try to imagine what is the kind of smell. But it helps me like, it helps me that it's real. You know, it's something that we happen.

- **Respondent 10: Male, Professional**
  I know we definitely did at least once in our book club. So I'm pretty sure we probably, we did it in St Timothy's as well. What I'm going to say is…so recalling, recalling what we did, putting myself in the shoes of one of the characters. It was actually pretty cool. It was a pretty cool experience. The first time we did it, I was like, Oh, wow, I've never tried to engage the Bible this way before. I thought it, I thought it was great. It was almost like it was like in my imagination I'm doing this, because they do these these like, sort of like rides and like theme parks where it's like, you're watching TV, or you're seeing things while you're watching the TV, or the movie, in first person perspective, like you're part of it, yeah. To do that, I've

never done it before, and I thought it was so cool. And it definitely…at least for me, it served like…it challenges my brain to consider things that otherwise I would not have considered. It's a lot like, you're sort of like watching The Chosen to be honest. You're there, and you actually see the things. When I'm reading the Bible, it's, it's, it's not as easy to picture, you know, the objects like the way things look. And to realize, like, 2000 years ago, things look very different. People spoke very differently. People look very different, as well, the way they dress and all that stuff. So, so the exercise of immersing yourself in the Scripture and trying to imagine what you would look like as one of the characters and what's your friend would look or what Jesus would look like such as he, as he talks to you. I think it lets the brain…it engages the part of the brain that otherwise would not really engage. And and yeah, I think it's it's very effective. It's a very effective, it's a very effective technique, engaging the Scripture. It's funny, the more, the more we talk about this, the more I don't know, the more impressed I am, the more amazed I am about with the that these techniques are being applied. Yeah, I hope I hope I hope it catches on.

- **Respondent 11: Male, Graduate Student**
  Yeah, I'm not sure to what extent…I mean, we've done that in like the reflections and stuff. Like, it's good. I mean that often…it's hard to time. So I feel like, you generally err on the side of more time. Because I generally come to decisions quicker, but yeah, it fits with the vibe of the church.

- **Respondent 12: Female, Graduate Student**
  Honestly, I kind of suck at the guided meditation. To be honest, I am not really good at meditating. So to me, that's not…it doesn't really help me as much just because my mind goes everywhere. And so I'm just like, I'm sorry. Like, I just I lose focus a lot when it's like meditation, I'm trying to work on that, but it's just a different way of like, learning and I'm just like, I really have not mastered that yet. So, but I don't have the best report on that.

- **Respondent 13: Female, Graduate Student**
  Um, I would say that it's, it's kind of like a quiet time where, you know, you're in a space with people that are doing the same with you, and it's the right place and you're, like, accepted and it's okay. And at the same time, it's also allowing you to be as you are as a person and engage with God and His Word, be able to meditate on the Word and actually talk to him as well. And so those times because I feel like they've been more useful to me in times where I've had like hard weeks where I haven't been able to pray or haven't been able to sit down and actually read and concentrate. So having that external pointer is kinda like you're okay, we can do this together is like having someone to hold your hand and walk you through it, even though it's kind of hard in that moment, so yeah.

- **Respondent 14: Male, Graduate Student**
  l'm like a visual learner more so kind of have to see something. So it's good to read the scripture. But I think also being able to kind of picture what I might see if I can do that is just is a little bit more helpful.

- **Respondent 15: Male, Professional**
  It depends. Some guided meditations work well for me. Others do not. If it's too prescriptive it doesn't work as well. But I find a little guidance, a little setting the stage can help a lot in engaging with God. Silence can be wonderful. But sometimes a little structure and a little guidance can help facilitate a meaningful encounter with God.

7. Anything additional you want to add?

- **Respondent 3: Female, Graduate Student**
  I suspect St. Timothy's will be an interesting case study, because you basically took like, all the humans who have nothing in common, are completely different on a daily basis. And then we're like, what if put them together. […]

  I mean, I understand the interview is probably over. But I would suspect with St. Timothy's. What it is, is like, I think it's particular styles help. I suspect, though, that what works so well is it's a loving community. So everybody's deeply generous, where they're coming at it from a place of good faith, which makes it a whole lot easier to take something away in any context. Like, you've got Derefe over there, like I'm a sensitive flower. And you know, I'm over here like, I'll just, I'm angry. And Eva's like I don't think I've worked hard enough today. .

- **Respondent 5: Female, Undergraduate Student**
  Yeah, I definitely think that interactiveness helps so much, because it's like, like I said, I went to a Catholic church for, I still do. So 19 years of my life, I keep thinking I'm 17, which is so scary, that happens so much. I was about to say 17 years, 19 years of my life. And, yeah, it's just very, like…I think structure is good. But at the same time, it doesn't leave an avenue for you to really, you know, hear God from yourself. Like, I feel like, that's extra work that you're gonna have to do on your own, which I mean, I think should be done anyways since you want to grow closer to God, but I definitely think, you know, if I'm going to church, I want to get something out of it. I don't want to, you know, be asked the question, Oh, what did you learn and have nothing like, it's terrible. I can't do that. So I do, like, you know, the interactiveness because, you know, it allows for more contemplation, which I think is what's needed. And I feel like, at least people in my generation we're very independent. And we're like, really like, Okay, well, I don't want to be told what to do, which I mean, is a blessing and a curse, I guess. But it's like, okay, I don't want to be told what to do. I don't want to be told what to think. It's like, okay, yes. At the same time, you know, you do need some guidance, but I think, you know, just giving younger people that space to be able to, you know, think and be like, Okay, well, this is what it could mean, you know, I think you guys create such a loving environment that, you know, anything that you guys do is perfect, and it'll work.

- **Respondent 6: Male, Graduate Student**
  And, like the first time I came to St. Timothy's like I was just, like, amazed that how good it was like, honestly, I'm not just saying this for the video. Like, I was just extremely impressed. Like how reflective and personal it is. And like, Yeah, I think I personally just feel like you both you and Vince are doing like a very great job. Like, and of course, God is behind it. Yeah, I think it's, as opposed to having like, a forty minute sermon. I think what you're doing is, you know, better to doing that. Because let's be honest, people like start zoning out. And like, you know what I mean? The tasks always keep it just keeps us accountable, keeps us on our toes and keeps us

engaged. I think that's the main thing. If I'm allowed to add anything to the engaged, that's a good word. Yeah. So yeah.

- **Respondent 8: Male, Professional**
  Yeah, and I have always loved when you have asked, you know, you know, how are you hearing that text? Like, especially in church, you know, like, that's something that I've never seen before, but I love it. I love it because I get to see how I'm viewing it and I also get to hear all other people are viewing it so it's, it's so interactive, and it keeps you awake. Because the thing with churches, you know, like, people fall asleep in church, I've done it. And I've seen my family do it. And I've seen other people do it, you know, so you know, I don't do it now because I'm grown but when I was younger, I would fall asleep. But yeah, it's so that definitely quite literally keeps you awake. And it's awakes your soul, but it also wakes in your mind quite literally. So I love it. I love it. Yeah.

- **Respondent 9: Female, Graduate Student**
  Oh, that's a good question. I really haven't thought about that. Change something. change something? Well, if I don't want the sermon to be longer. I mean, I'd like to have a longer one, but…Yeah, I think I think I would, I would like to. I think that's it. I mean, I wish it could be a little longer. I think I think it's all incorporated already. Like the sense of community is already there in sharing. So I think it's very inclusive. What do you call something like that? I feel like I'm really a part of the community.

- **Respondent 10: Male, Professional**
  I think it's, at least for me, I think it's more, I have to do it more. So if you've only been doing it for a little bit, I think, I think I think there's a little bit of practice a little bit of learning curve, just like meditation. But meditation doesn't come to people easily. So it's definitely some sort of, there's a bit of a learning curve that needs to happen. So that's less probably why. And then, of course, you know, you're a teacher, you know, like in the classroom is not as easy to like…if it was one on one, it would probably, you'd probably get more engagement, but like, as soon as you put the next person, they're like, everybody gets cautious. So like I'm just gonna be neutral and try not to you know like, I'm not gonna cry, even though like I'm about to, I'm not gonna cry and get a let like Alex see me cry. So there's that.

  I mean, like, like you said, it's more effective than what it looks. And let me just comment, I think I think the university is a perfect place for trying these things out, I think the demographic plays a huge part in how this is being accepted. Hopefully, it will catch on to the more traditional generation. What I feel like, you know, the younger generations…I don't want to, I don't want to be presumptions, but if I have to guess, like, I feel like this style of service, the style of preaching, the style of consuming the scriptures, maybe the, the new way that the new generation just needs for it to spread. Because I feel like there's a big gap between the ages. And it's a little sad to see it that way. But I feel like this new technique may be…I'm hoping

I'm praying that this is the new type church that the new generation needs to come back to, for us to come back.

- **Respondent 14: Male, Graduate Student**
  I think so this since this format of sermon is new for me, I've been someone that has recently kind of like sat back and taken notes. And I think what was hard at first, when I, when I joined in January, was not feeling comfortable right away to like share. And throughout the semester, I've got a little bit better. But I think that can be a challenge for people that come new or people that are shy is you still kind of get those questions. And maybe, you know, in the beginning, I reflect on them on my own, but I don't feel quite comfortable enough to share. And then until…everybody's different, but until that barrier is broken, it may not feel quite as interactive.

  And then when you are it's a lot, it's a lot more comfortable. And that timeline is different for everybody.

  Yeah, I like having the chance to kind of like highlight, see the passage and write down answers to some questions and give that space that can be a little more comfortable. And then share, well, when you're more comfortable. But I think one thing too, about the context of services is that we all feel might feel a little bit of judgment whenever we give an answer until a certain point, but in this sense, there's really not a right or wrong answer. It's more just kind of sharing your perception and asking questions. And I think the more that can be encouraged, at least like has helped my comfort level.

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